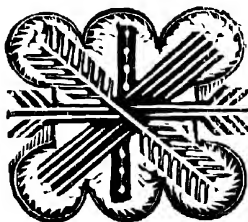


WILLIAM COWPLER, born in Hertfordshire in 1731, the son of a rector. Educated at Westminster School and then articled to an attorney. Spent some time in an asylum, and on his recovery went to live in Huntingdon. Died in East Dereham in 1800.

SELECTED LETTERS



WILLIAM COWPER

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INTRODUCTION

"WILLIAM COWPER, the best of English letter-writers," was Southey's judgment given nearly a century ago, and very few later critics have ventured to dispute that statement. One modern writer calls him "the greatest of letter-writers in a nation of letter-writers"; another, "the English letter-writer who has perhaps the widest fame"; and a third declares that "these letters are, in my opinion, the most charming ever written in the English language."

Never were letters composed with less idea of publication. Explaining on one occasion why he destroyed all but business correspondence, Cowper continues: "In the destruction of all other epistles I consult the good of my friends; for I account it a point of delicacy not to leave behind me when I die, such bundles of their communications as I otherwise should for the inspection of I know not whom, and as I deal with others, for the very same reason, I most heartily wish them to deal with mine." As a consequence, his letters are perfectly natural and sincere, free from the pose that Cowper found so disgusting in those of Pope, "the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with." His gossiping correspondence, "talking upon paper," wonderfully reveals the writer's personality, showing every phase of his mind from the almost unutterable despair to the whimsical humour that gave the creator of John Gilpin immediate place among the immortals. He has given a faithful picture of an almost eventless life spent in a dull provincial town where occurrences were as rare "as cucumbers at Christmas"; but the least important of these happenings are recorded in a manner that has been surpassed by no other English letter-writer.

He was a shrewd judge of human character, and he has delineated his friends and neighbours so faithfully that they live for all time. In his critical opinions he rarely went astray, and his remarks on current events show sanity of judgment and farsightedness. No one excels him in the art of telling a good story; such anecdotes as the candidate's visit, the

hare's escape, the talkative visitor and the noisy robins reveal a vivacity of manner and a playfulness of humour that enliven the most trivial of incidents.

With the exception of his verse epistles and his rhyming letter, all his correspondence was written with unstudied care, and the uniform excellence of his letters makes the task of choosing a difficult one. These letters, taken from Southey's edition, have been selected and arranged not only to illustrate Cowper's life, his character and opinions, but also to throw some light on the period to which he belonged. A few explanatory footnotes have been added, and brief quotations from Cowper's poetry have been given where they illustrate certain points in the letters.

For those who desire further information the following books are recommended:

T. WRIGHT, *The Correspondence of William Cowper* (the standard edition in 4 vols.)

T. WRIGHT, *The Life of Cowper*.

T. WRIGHT, *The Town of Cowper*

W. T. WEBB, *Selections from Cowper's Letters*.

A. AINGER, *Cowper* (in Vol. I. of his *Lectures and Essays*).

M. HARLAND, *William Cowper* (Literary Hearthstones).

J. A. ROY, *Cowper and his Poetry* (The Poetry and Life Series)

G. SMITH, *William Cowper* (English Men of Letters Series)

A. J. SYMINGTON and Others, *The Poet of Home Life* (Centenary Memories of Cowper).

J. C. BAILEY, *Studies in Some Famous Letters*.

F. A. MUMBY, *Letters of Literary Men*.

W. B. SCOONLS, *Four Centuries of English Letters*.

W. E. LECKY, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*.

H. D. TRAILL and J. S. MANN, *Social England* (Vol. V).

To these, and many other writers, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness

W. H.

September 1922

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IMPORTANT DATES IN COWPER'S LIFE

- 1731. Born at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire (15 Nov.)
- 1737. Mother died.
- 1741-9. A pupil at Westminster School.
- 1749. Articled to an attorney (Mr. Chapman).
- 1752. Took chambers in the Temple. First attack of melancholy.
- 1754. Called to the Bar.
- 1756. Father died.
- 1763. Offered a clerkship in the House of Lords by his uncle. Nervous fears made him attempt suicide.
- 1763-5. In Doctor Cotton's asylum at St. Albans.
- 1765-7. Recovered and retired to Huntingdon, where he resided with the Unwins.
- 1767. Removed with Mrs. Unwin to Olney.
- 1770. Death of Cowper's brother (John).
- 1771. *Olney Hymns* begun in collaboration with the Rev. John Newton.
- 1773. Severe attack of insanity.
- 1779. Publication of the Hymns.
- 1780. *Moral Satires* begun at Mrs. Unwin's suggestion.
- 1782. The Satires published and *John Gilpin* written.
- 1783. *The Task* begun, the subject recommended by Lady Austen.
- 1784. Wrote the *Tirocinium* and began translation of Homer.
- 1786. Removed to Weston Underwood.
- 1788. Iliad finished and *Odyssey* begun.
- 1790. Received mother's picture.
- 1791. Translation of Homer published.
- 1792. Visited by Hayley and paid return visit to Eartham.
- 1795. Left Weston for Norfolk.
- 1796. Death of Mrs. Unwin.
- 1800. Died at East Dereham (25 April).

The following is a list of the works of William Cowper:

Anti-Thelyphthoia, 1781; **Poems by William Cowper of the Inner Temple, Esq.**, 1782; **The Task, The Epistle to Joseph Hill, Throckmorton, and John Gilpin**, 1785, **Homer's Iliad and Odyssey**, 2 vols., 1791, **The Power of Grace illustrated in six Letters from a Minister of the Reformed Church to John Newton**, translated by Cowper, 1792, **Poems**, 1798.

POSTHUMOUS WORKS **Poems from the French of Madame de la Motte Guyon**, to which are added some original Poems, 1801, **Adelphi: a Sketch**, 1802; **Latin and Italian Poems of Milton**, translated by W. Cowper, 1808. Cowper's Milton, containing new translations, appeared in four vols. in 1910.

COLLECTED EDITIONS **Poems**, in 3 vols. (with some new pieces), 1815. **Works**, edited by Robert Southey, 15 vols., 1834-7. **Works**, edited by T. S. Grimshawe, 8 vols., 1835.

LETTERS **The Letters of William Cowper**, 3 vols., 1817; **Private Correspondence of William Cowper**, edited by J. Johnson, 2 vol., 1824; **Letters of William Cowper**, edited by J. S. Momes, 1861; **Correspondence of William Cowper**, 4 vols., 1904; **Unpublished and Uncollected Letters of William Cowper**, edited by Thomas Wright, 1925.

LIFE —By William Hayley, 2 vols., 1803, by J. Johnson (prefixed to his edition of the Poems), 1815, **Memoirs of the Early Life of William Cowper**, written by himself, 1816; by John Bruce (prefixed to the Aldine Edition of the Poems), 1865, by Rev. W. Benham (prefixed to the Globe Edition), 1870; by Goldwin Smith, 1880, by Thomas Wright, 1892.

COWPER'S LETTERS

I. COWPER'S LIFE

I. HIS BOYHOOD

(LETTERS I.—XIII.)

William Cowper was born on 15 November, 1731, at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, where his father was the rector. His mother, a descendant of the poet Donne, died a few days after the birth of her son John in November 1737. Although Cowper was barely six years of age, she had made such a deep impression on him that long years of suffering could never efface her from his memory. Later he was sent to a boarding-school at Market Street, in Bedfordshire, where he was so cruelly bullied by one boy that his eyesight was affected by constant crying. He was taken away and placed under the care of an oculist for two years, until he was ready to enter Westminster School. Here he seems to have been happy enough, taking part in the various school games, and imbibing a love of the Classics, particularly Homer, from "Vinny" (Vincent) Bourne, his indolent usher, some of whose Latin poems he afterwards translated into English. Whilst still at school, he made the acquaintance of his two cousins, Harriet (afterwards Lady Hesketh) and Theodora, the daughters of Ashley Cowper.

I.

TO MRS. KING

MY DEAR MADAM,

Weston Underwood, Dec. 6, 1788

. . . Mrs. Battison being dead, I began to fear that you would have no more calls to Bedford; but the marriage, so near at hand, of the young lady you mention with a gentleman of the place, gives me hope again that you may occasionally approach us as heretofore, and that on some of those occasions you will perhaps find your way to Weston. The deaths of some and the marriages of others makes a new world of it every thirty years. Within that space of time, the majority are displaced, and a new generation has succeeded. Here and there one is permitted to stay a little longer, that there may not be wanting a few grave dons like myself, to make the observation. This thought struck me very forcibly the other day, on reading a paper called the *County*

Chronicle, which came hither in the package of some books from London. It contained news from Hertfordshire, and informed me, among other things, that at Great Berkhamstead, the place of my birth, there is hardly a family left of all those with whom, in my earlier days, I was so familiar. The houses, no doubt, remain, but the inhabitants are only to be found now by their grave-stones; and it is certain that I might pass through a town, in which I was once a sort of principal figure, unknowing and unknown. They are happy who have not taken up their rest in a world fluctuating as the sea, and passing away with the rapidity of a river. . . .

Most affectionately yours,

W. C.

II.

TO MRS. BODHAM

MY DEAR COZ,

Weston, Nov 21, 1760

. . . Mrs. Hewitt probably remembers more of my childhood than I can recollect, either of hers or my own; but this I recollect, that the days of that period were happy days, compared with most I have seen since. There are few perhaps in the world who have not cause to look back with regret on the days of infancy: yet, to say the truth, I suspect some deception in this. For infancy itself has its cares; and though we cannot now conceive how trifles could affect us much, it is certain that they did. Trifles they appear now, but such they were not then.

W. C.

III.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov 1784

To condole with you on the death of a mother aged eighty-seven would be absurd; rather, therefore, as is reasonable, I congratulate you on the almost singular felicity of having enjoyed the company of so amiable, and so near a relation so long. Your lot and mine in this respect have been very different, as indeed in almost every other. Your mother lived to see you rise, at least to see you comfortably established in the world: mine, dying when I was six years old, did not live to see me sink in it. You may remember with pleasure, while you live, a blessing vouchsafed to you so long; and I, while I live, must regret a comfort of which I was deprived so early. I can truly say, that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a

day), in which I do not think of her. Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short. But the ways of God are equal—and when I reflect on the pangs she would have suffered, had she been a witness of all mine, I see more cause to rejoice than to mourn, that she was hidden in the grave so soon.

W. C.

IV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 19, 1784

. . . In those days when Bedlam¹ was open to the cruel curiosity of holiday ramblers, I have been a visitor there. Though a boy, I was not altogether insensible of the misery of the poor captives, nor destitute of feeling for them. But the madness of some of them had such a humorous air, and displayed itself in so many whimsical freaks, that it was impossible not to be entertained, at the same time that I was angry with myself for being so. A line of Bourne's is very expressive of the spectacle which this world exhibits, tragi-comical as the incidents of it are, absurd in themselves, but terrible in their consequences:

Sunt res humanæ flebile ludibrium.

. . . Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

V.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 23, 1781.

If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer! Your desire to see my muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast, blown through every newspaper, would have said—"The poet is coming!"—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every

¹ One of the "sights" of London then. (cf. Goldsmith's *Essay on the Courts of Justice (Citizen of the World)*: "I had some intentions lately of going to visit Bedlam.")

day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, that is to say, not till next winter.

This misfortune however comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself; no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important where poetry is concerned! A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps, which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud of. . .

I shall be obliged to you if you will buy me a handsome stock-buckle, for a very little money; for twenty or twenty-five shillings perhaps a second-hand affair may be purchased that will make a figure at Olney.

I am much obliged to you for your offer to support me in a translation of Bourne. It is but seldom, however, and never except for my amusement, that I translate, because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should at least be sure to find it so in a business of any length. Again, *that* is epigrammatic and witty in Latin, which would be perfectly insipid in English; and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the turn, which is in fact the most difficult, and the most expensive part of the whole composition, and could not perhaps, in many instances, be done with any tolerable success. If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough; but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, in comparing the *Jackdaw* with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point which, though smart enough in the Latin, would, in English, have appeared as plain, and as blunt, as the tag of a lace. I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to *him*. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster, when I passed through it. He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for every thing that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. His humour is entirely original; he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all this drollery there is a mixture of

rational, and even religious reflection at times: and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author who can make you smile, and yet at nobody's expense; who is always entertaining, and yet always harmless; and who, though always elegant, and classical to a degree not always found even in the classics themselves, charms more by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas, than by the neatness and purity of his verse; yet such was poor Vinny. I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again. . . .

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

VI.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Nov 30, 1788

Your letter, accompanying the books with which you have favoured me, and for which I return you a thousand thanks, did not arrive till yesterday. I shall have great pleasure in taking now and then a peep at my old friend Vincent Bourne; the neatest of all men in his versification, though when I was under his ushership at Westminster, the most slovenly in his person. He was so inattentive to his boys, and so indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, or none at all, that he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last Latin poet of the Westminster line: a plot which, I believe, he executed very successfully; for I have not heard of any who has at all deserved to be compared with him. . . .

Adieu,

W. C.

VII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 1781.

. . . This fine weather I suppose sets you on horseback, and allures the ladies into the garden. If I was at Stock,¹ I should be of their party; and while they sat knotting or netting in the shade, should comfort myself with the thought, that I had not a beast under me whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot

¹ In Essex, where the Rev. W. Unwin was a curate.

would jumble me, and whose gallop might throw me into a ditch. What Nature expressly designed me for I have never been able to conjecture; I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind. When I was a boy, I excelled at cricket and football, but the fame I acquired by achievements in that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in anything since. I am sure, however, that she did not design me for a horseman; and that, if all men were of my mind, there would be an end of all jockeyship for ever. I am rather straitened in time, and not very rich in materials, therefore, with our joint love to you all, conclude myself,

Yours ever,

W. C.

VIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

. . . I ask for pardon for neglecting a subject on which you consulted me in your last. It is too much my practice to reply to a letter without reading it at the time, and on this occasion my memory failed me. I am no friend to Lily's *Grammar*, though I was indebted to him for my first introduction to the Latin language. The grammars used at Westminster, both for the Latin and the Greek, are those to which, if I had a young man to educate, I should give the preference. They have the merit of being compendious and perspicuous, in both which properties I judge Lily to be defective. If I am not mistaken, however, they are in use at the Charterhouse, so that I have no need to describe them to you. They are called Busby's *Grammars*, though Busby did not compose them. The compilation was a task imposed upon his uppermost boys, the plan only being drawn by the master, and the versification, which I have often admired for the ingenuity of it, being theirs. I never knew a boy of any abilities who had taken his notion of language from those grammars, that was not accurate to a degree that distinguished him from most others.

Yours,

WM. COWPER.

IX.

TO LADY HESKETH

Oney, June 4 and 5, 1786

Ah! my cousin, you begin already to fear and quake. What a hero am I, compared with you: I have no fears of you; on the

contrary am as bold as a lion. I wish that your carriage were even now at the door. You should soon see with how much courage I would face you. But what cause have you for fear? Am I not your cousin, with whom you have wandered in the fields of Freemantle,¹ and at Bevis's Mount? who used to read to you, laugh with you, till our sides have ached, at anything, or nothing? And am I in these respects at all altered? You will not find me so; but just as ready to laugh, and to wander, as you ever knew me. A cloud perhaps may come over me now and then, for a few hours, but from clouds I was never exempted. And are not you the identical cousin with whom I have performed all these feats? The very Harriet whom I saw, for the first time, at De Grey's,² in Norfolk Street? (It was on a Sunday, when you came with my uncle and aunt to drink tea there, and I had dined there, and was just going back to Westminster.) If these things are so, and I am sure that you cannot gainsay a syllable of them all, then this consequence follows: that I do not promise myself more pleasure from your company than I shall be sure to find. Then you are my cousin, in whom I always delighted, and in whom I doubt not that I shall delight even to my latest hour.

Yours, with impatient desire to see you,

W. C.

X.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

. . . I find the *Register* in all respects an entertaining medley; but especially in this, that it has brought to my view some long-forgotten-pieces of my own production;—I mean by the way two or three. These I have marked with my own initials, and you may be sure I found them peculiarly agreeable, as they had not only the grace of being mine, but that of novelty likewise to recommend them. It is at least twenty years since I saw them. You, I think, was never a dabbler in rhyme. I have been one ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus.³ I have no more right to the name of a poet, than a maker of mouse-traps has to that of an engineer: but my little exploits in this way have at times amused me so

¹ Near Southampton.

² A school-fellow, afterwards a member of the Nonsense Club.

At Westminster, where little poets strive
To set a distich upon six and five . . .
I was a poet, too.

much, that I have often wished myself a good one. Such a talent in verse as mine is like a child's rattle—very entertaining to the trifier that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy moments, for I only take it up as a gentleman performer does his fiddle. I have this peculiarity belonging to me as a rhymist, that though I am charmed to a great degree with my own work, while it is on the anvil, I can seldom bear to look at it when it is once finished. The more I contemplate it, the more it loses of its value, till I am at last quite disgusted with it. I then throw it by, take it up again perhaps ten years after, and am as much delighted with it as at first.

Few people have the art of being agreeable when they talk of themselves; if you are not weary therefore by this time you pay me a high compliment. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

XI.

TO MRS. KING,

Dec 6, 1788

. . . I have never seen the *Observer*, but am pleased with being handsomely spoken of by an old school-fellow. Cumberland and I boarded together in the same house at Westminster. He was at that time clever, and I suppose has given proof sufficient to the world that he is still clever! but of all that he has written, it has never fallen in my way to read a syllable, except perhaps in a magazine or review, the sole sources, at present, of all my intelligence. Addison speaks of persons who grow dumb in the study of eloquence, and I have actually studied Homer till I am become a mere ignoramus in every other province of literature.

An almost general cessation of egg-laying among the hens has made it impossible for Mrs. Unwin to enterprise a cake. She, however, returns you a thousand thanks for the receipt; and being now furnished with the necessary ingredients, will begin directly. My letter-writing time is spent, and I must now to Homer. With my best respects to Mr. King, I remain, dear madam,

Most affectionately yours,

W. C.

XII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

. . . He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle,

I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a school-boy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary.¹ No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do. I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes, as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did; accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with my master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form, for the admiration of all who were able to understand it. Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance? It follows on the other side.

[*Torn off.*]

XIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb 18, 1781

. . . You have been married thirty-one years last Monday. When you married I was eighteen years of age, and had just left Westminster school. At that time, I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride, and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life, than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure, as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood, that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed*; I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures. Then I learned the truth, and then I lost it; and there ends my history. I would no more than you wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason. He that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot,

¹ We love the play-place of our early days,
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone,
That feels not at that sight

would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey.

Yours, my dear Sir, with our joint love,
W. C.

2. HIS LEGAL CAREER—FIRST ATTACK OF INSANITY

(LETTERS XIV.—XXIV.)

On leaving school, Cowper was articled to Mr. Chapman, a solicitor of Ely Place, in whose office he met his fellow-clerk, Edward Thurlow, the future Chancellor of England. Here he spent—or rather misspent—three idle years, wasting much of his time with his cousins, Harriet and Theodora, at their house in Southampton Row. "There was I and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed, from morning to night, in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law." Cowper afterwards fell in love with Theodora, but her father forbade the marriage. In 1752 the young law-student took chambers in the Temple, and it was here that he was first visited with the malady that so darkened his later years. He recovered after a visit to Southampton, and returned to his perfunctory study of the law; indeed, Cowper devoted much more of his time to literary pursuits, contributing to the *Connoisseur*, a paper edited by Colman, his old schoolfellow and one of the chief members of the Thursday or Nonsense Club. The others, too, were all old Westminster boys—Bonnell Thornton, Lloyd, James Hill, Bensley and William de Grey—who dabbled in literature. Cowper joined the club and took Thurlow there occasionally as a visitor. He was called to the Bar in 1754, two years before the death of his father.

Cowper was now left to his own resources; his little patrimony was rapidly diminishing, and there seemed little prospect of his being able to maintain himself by his own efforts. A kinsman, Major Cowper, came to his help, and offered him a clerical position in the House of Lords; but when he learnt that a public examination at the Bar of the House would be obligatory, his mind became unhinged with the fear of this ordeal, and he attempted to hang himself. For the next eighteen months he was confined in Dr. Cotton's private asylum at St. Albans.

XIV.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

MY DEAR JOHN,

Weston, June 7, 1790.

. . . You could not apply to a worse than I am to advise you concerning your studies. I was never a regular student myself, but lost the most valuable years of my life in an attorney's office, and in the Temple. I will not therefore give myself airs, and affect to know what I know not. The affair is of great importance to you, and you should be directed in it by a wiser than I. To speak however in very general terms on the subject, it seems to me that your chief concern is with history, natural philosophy, logic, and divinity. As to metaphysics, I know little

about them. But the very little that I do know has not taught me to admire them. Life is too short to afford time even for serious trifles. Pursue what you know to be attainable, make truth your object, and your studies will make you a wise man! Let your divinity, if I may advise, be the divinity of the glorious Reformation! I mean in contradistinction to Arminianism, and all the *isms* that were ever broached in this world of error and ignorance. . . .

W. C.

XV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Olney, April 17, 1786.

. . . I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I, and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin! how could you do so? I am pleased with Lord Thurlow's inquiries about me. If he takes it into that inimitable head of his he may make a man of me yet. I could love him heartily, if he would but deserve it at my hands. That I did so once is certain. . . .

Yours, my dear friend and cousin,

W. C.

XVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 24, 1785

I am sorry that an excursion, which you would otherwise have found so agreeable, was attended with so great a drawback upon its pleasures as Miss Cunningham's illness must needs have been. Had she been able to bathe in the sea, it might have been of service to her; but I knew her weakness and delicacy of habit to be such as did not encourage any very sanguine hopes that the regimen would suit her. I remember Southampton well, having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly-room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fireside, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born

one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air, and wore trowsers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages. you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I; I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a cornfield or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgement of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark: and we are sure that Jonah was, when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the *Harriet*.

Believe me, my dear friend,

With true affection, yours,

W. C.

XVII.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Weston, Oct. 19, 1787

. . . You find yourself, I hope, by this time as comfortably situated in your new abode. as in a new abode one can be. I enter perfectly into all your feelings on occasion of the change. A sensible mind cannot do violence even to a local attachment without much pain. When my father died I was young, too young to have reflected much. He was Rector of Berkhamstead, and there I was born. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not

feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt for the first time that I and my native place were disunited for ever. I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I should never be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more.

W. C.

XVIII

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,

Aug 1758

While you are following your *Rhadamanthus* with more pains, as you tell me, than profit, I, who neither take pains nor hope for profit, am leading an idle, and therefore what is to me a most agreeable life: nor do I envy you the country, dirty as it now is, and daily deluged with unseasonable rain. Sometimes, indeed, I go into the adjacent parts of the country, to visit a friend or a lady; but it is a short journey, and such as may easily be performed on foot, or in a hired carriage, for never, unless compelled to do it, do I mount a horse, because I have a tender skin which with little exercise of that kind suffers sorely. I lately passed three days at Greenwich: a blessed three days, and if they had been three years I should not have envied the gods their immortality. There I found that lovely and beloved little girl, of whom I have often talked to you; she is at that age, sixteen, at which every day brings with it some new beauty to her form. No one can be more modest, nor (which seems wonderful in a woman) more silent, but when she speaks, you might believe that a Muse was speaking. Woe is me that so bright a star looks to another region, having risen in the West Indies, thither it is about to return, and will leave me nothing but sighs and tears. . . .

W. C.¹

XIX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM CUNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 30, 1785

You mention Bensley, I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better. We were schoolfellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men, to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please

¹ This letter was written in Latin.

God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will, like Bensley (who was but a boy when I left London), boast of a connexion with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St. Paul himself, I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour; and one talent, if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr. Johnson, I remember, in the life of one of our poets (I believe of Savage) says, that he retired from the world, flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is, that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up, that a man may always be obscure, if he chooses to be so, and that he, who neglects the world, will be by the world neglected. . . .

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectation,

Yours truly,

W. C.

XX.

TO JOSEPH HILL ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Olney, June 9, 1786.

The little time that I can devote to any other purpose than that of poetry is as you may suppose, taken. Homer's *Odyssey*. Much is done, but much remains undone, and too much to be more attentive to the performance of business, than I am. You will therefore excuse me if at present I am both sedulous and short.

The paper tells me that the Chancellor has relapsed, and I am truly sorry to hear it. The first attack was dangerous, but a second must be more formidable. It is not probable that I should ever hear from him again if he survives, yet of the much that I should have felt for him, had not come soon, never been interrupted, I still feel much. Everybody will feel the loss of a man whose abilities have made him of such general importance.

I correspond again with Colman, and upon the most friendly footing, and find in his instance (and in every other), that an intimate intercourse, which has been only casually suspended, not forfeited on either side by outrage, is capable not only of revival, but improvement.

I had a letter some time since from your sister Fanny, that gave me great pleasure. Such notices from old friends are always pleasant, and of such pleasures I have received many lately. They refresh the remembrance of early days, and make me young again. The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer:

To whom replied the Devil vard-long-tailed

There never was anything more truly Grecian than that triple epithet, and were it possible to introduce it into either Iliad or Odyssey, I should certainly steal it. . . .

W. C.

XXI.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Olney, Feb 11, 1786

. . . I do not wish to remind the Chancellor of his promise. Ask you why, my cousin? Because I suppose it would be impossible. He has, no doubt, forgotten it entirely, and would be obliged to take my word for the truth of it, which I could not bear. We drank tea together with Mrs. C———e, and her sister, in King Street, Bloomsbury, and there was the promise made. I said, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are." He smiled, and replied, "I surely will"—"These ladies," said I, "are witnesses." He still smiled, and said—"Let them be so, for I will certainly do it." But alas! twenty-four years have passed since the day of the date thereof, and to mention it now would be to upbraid him with inattention to his plighted troth. Neither do I suppose he could easily serve such a creature as I am, if he would.

Adieu, whom I love entirely,

W. C.

XXII.

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ.

DEAR ROWLEY,

Sept. 2, 1762

Your letter has taken me just in the crisis, to-morrow I set off for Bughthelms-ton, and there I stay till the winter brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses us ill; but a few years hence there will be no difference between us and

our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetick as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humour; but my resolution is (and I would advise you to adopt it), never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but in the mean time *To Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic; but till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields with all its appurtenances; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice, and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by anything but his natural temper? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we were directed by others! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them properly; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it: but here it is, such as it is, and much good may do you with it. I have no estate, as it happens, so if it

should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy. Adieu! Carr is well, and gives his love to you.

Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

XXIII.

TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston, Aug. 9, 1791.

. . . I am obliged to you for comparing me as you go both with Pope and with Homer. It is impossible in any other way of management to know whether the Translation be well executed or not, and if well, in what degree. It was in the course of such a process, that I first became dissatisfied with Pope. More than thirty years since, and when I was a young Templar, I accompanied him with his original, line by line, through both poems. A fellow-student of mine,¹ a person of fine classic taste, joined himself with me in the labour. We were neither of us, as you may imagine, very diligent in our proper business.

I shall be glad if my reviewers, whosoever they may be, will be at the pains to read me as you do. I want no praise that I am not entitled to; but of that to which I am entitled I should be loth to lose a tittle, having worked hard to earn it. . . .

W. C.

XXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR COUSIN,

The Temple, Aug. 9, 1763.

Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals,² and my nights in dreaming of them. An employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numskull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion,³ I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution—a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author who has a spark of love for his

¹ Alston, by name.

² Cowper spent some months at the House of Lords preparing for his new duties.

³ Clerk of the Journals.

country. O! my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity!—I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, cousin? I know what you expect; but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, cousin, there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me; and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear cousin! So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.

Yours ever, and evermore,

W. C.

3. RECOVERY AND RETIREMENT TO HUNTINGDON

(LETTERS XXV.—XXXIV.)

After his recovery Cowper removed to Huntingdon in order to be near his younger brother, who was a fellow of Bennet's College. A few weeks after his arrival a young Cambridge undergraduate, William Unwin, introduced himself to the shy poet one Sunday after church, and presented him later to his family. Cowper was so attracted by the University, particularly by the mother, that he eventually went to reside with them. Two years afterwards, in 1767, the father was thrown from his horse and killed.

XXV.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Huntingdon, June 24, 1765.

The only recompense I can make you for your kind attention to my affairs during my illness, is to tell you, that by the mercy

of God I am restored to perfect health both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure; and I would gladly do anything from which you could receive it.

I left St. Alban's on the seventeenth, and arrived that day at Cambridge, spent some time there with my brother, and came hither on the twenty-second. I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions; we have had many worse, and except the size of it (which however is sufficient for a single man), but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Alban's,¹ who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these croniums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

The river Ouse (I forget how they spell it) is the most agreeable circums-ance in this part of the world; at this town it is I believe as wide as the Thames at Windsor, nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor had it more flowers upon its bank. These being attributes which in strict truth belong to neither. Fluellin would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both.² It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning.

I beg you will remember me to all my friends, which is a task will cost you no great pains to execute—particularly remember me to those of your own house, and believe me,

Your very affectionate

W. C.

XXVI

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Huntingdon, July 3, 1793

Whatever you may think of the matter, it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live upon sheep's heads, and liver and lights, like the lions in the Tower, and a joint of meat, in so small a family, is an endless

¹ Dick Colencher, whom he adopted to save from his father, a drunken cobbler of St. Alban.

² See *Henry IV.*, Act IV. sc. vii.

encumbrance. My butcher's bill for last week amounted to four shillings and tenpence. I set off with a leg of lamb, and was forced to give part of it away to my washerwoman. Then I made an experiment upon a sheep's heart, and that was too little. Next I put three pounds of beef into a pie, and this had like to have been too much, for it lasted three days, though my landlord was admitted to a share in it. Then as to small beer, I am puzzled to pieces about it. I have bought as much for a shilling, as will serve us at least a month, and it is grown sour already. In short, I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity.

I have received but one visit since here I came. I don't mean that I have refused any, but that only one has been offered. This was from my woollen-draper; a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponisible man, and extremely civil. He has a cold bath, and has promised me a key of it, which I shall probably make use of in the winter. He has undertaken, too, to get me the *St. James's Chronicle* three times a week, and to show me Hinchinbrook House, and to do every service for me in his power; so that I did not exceed the truth, you see, when I spoke of his civility. Here is a card-assembly, and a dancing-assembly, and a horse-race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor; and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places, I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition.

You are an old dog at a bad tenant; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if you once begin with him. Poor toad! I leave him entirely to your mercy.

My dear Joe, you desire me to write long letters—I have neither matter enough, nor perseverance enough for the purpose. However, if you can but contrive to be tired of reading as soon

as I am tired of writing, we shall find that short ones answer just as well; and, in my opinion, this is a very practicable measure.

My friend Colman has had good fortune; I wish him better fortune still; which is, that he may make a right use of it. The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of society, it is their own fault.

I was debtor to Bensley seven pounds, or nine, I forget which. If you can find out his brother, you will do me a great favour, if you will pay him for me; but do it at your leisure.

Yours and theirs,
W. C.

XXVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

Huntingdon, July 4, 1765.

Being just emerged from the Ouse, I sit down to thank you, my dear cousin, for your friendly and comfortable letter. What could you think of my unaccountable behaviour to you in that visit I mentioned in my last? I remember I neither spoke to you, nor looked at you. The solution of the mystery indeed followed soon after, but at the time it must have been inexplicable. The uproar within was even then begun, and my silence was only the sulkiness of a thunderstorm before it opens. I am glad, however, that the only instance in which I knew not how to value your company was, when I was not in my senses. It was the first of the kind, and I trust in God it will be the last.


How naturally does affliction make us Christians! and how impossible is it when all human help is vain, and the whole Earth too poor and trifling to furnish us with one moment's peace, how impossible is it then to avoid looking at the Gospel! It gives me some concern, though at the same time it increases my gratitude, to reflect that a convert made in Bedlam is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others, than to advance their faith. But if it had that effect upon any, it is owing to their reasoning amiss, and drawing their conclusions from false premises. He who can ascribe an amendment of life and manners, and a reformation of the heart itself, to madness, is guilty of an absurdity that in any other case would fasten the imputation of madness upon himself; for by so doing he ascribes a reasonable effect to an unreasonable cause, and a positive effect to a negative. But when Christianity only is to be sacrificed, he that stabs deepest is always the wisest man. You, my dear cousin, yourself will be apt to think I carry the matter too far, and that in the present warmth of my heart I make too ample a concession in saying, that I am *only now* a convert. You think

I always believed, and I thought so too; but you were deceived, and so was I. I called myself indeed a Christian; but He who knows my heart knows that I never did a right thing, nor abstained from a wrong one, because I was so; but if I did either, it was under the influence of some other motive. And it is such seeming Christians, such pretending believers, that do most mischief to the cause, and furnish the strongest arguments to support the infidelity of its enemies: unless profession and conduct go together, the man's life is a lie, and the validity of what he professes itself is called in question. The difference between a Christian and an Unbeliever would be so striking, if the treacherous allies of the Church would go over at once to the other side, that I am satisfied religion would be no loser by the bargain.

I reckon it one instance of the Providence that has attended me throughout this whole event, that instead of being delivered into the hands of one of the London physicians, who were so much nearer that I wonder I was not, I was carried to Doctor Cotton.¹ I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind upon the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long-neglected point made it necessary that, while my mind was yet weak, and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do it, as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an irregular appetite, and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself; and it is well for me that he was so.

My dear cousin, you know not half the deliverances I have received; my brother is the only one in the family who does. My recovery is indeed a signal one; but a greater, if possible, went before it. My future life must express my thankfulness, for by words I cannot do it.

I pray God to bless you and my friend Sir Thomas.

Yours ever,
W. C. 

¹ Cotton, whose humanity sheds rays,
That make superior skill his second praise.

XXVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH,

Huntingdon, July 5, 1765

My pen runs so fast you will begin to wish you had not put it in motion, but you must consider we have not met even by letter almost these two years, which will account in some measure for my pestering you in this manner; besides, my last was no answer to yours, and therefore I consider myself as still in your debt. To say truth, I have this long time promised myself a correspondence with you as one of my principal pleasures.

I should have written to you from St. Alban's long since, but was willing to perform quarantine first, both for my own sake and because I thought my letters would be more satisfactory to you from any other quarter. You will perceive I allowed myself a very sufficient time for the purpose, for I date my recovery from the twenty-fifth of last July, having been ill seven months, and well twelve months. It was on that day my brother came to see me. I was far from well when he came in; yet, though he only staid one day with me, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions which I still laboured under, and the next morning I found myself a new creature. But to the present purpose.

As far as I am acquainted with this place, I like it extremely. Mr. Hodgson, the minister of the parish, made me a visit the day before yesterday. He is very sensible, a good preacher, and conscientious in the discharge of his duty. He is very well known to Doctor Newton, Bishop of Bristol, the author of the treatise on the Prophecies, one of our best bishops, and who has written the most demonstrative proof of the truth of Christianity, in my mind, that ever was published.

There is a village called HARTFORD, about a mile and a half from hence. The church there is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which being better than anything else I saw there I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband.

Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,
And I not good enough to die with thee

• The distance of this place from Cambridge is the worst circumstance belonging to it. My brother and I are fifteen miles asunder, which, considering that I came hither for the sake of being near him, is rather too much. I wish that young man was better

known in the family. He has as many good qualities as his nearest kindred could wish to find in him.

As Mr. Quin¹ very roundly expressed himself upon some such occasion, "here is very plentiful accommodation, and great happiness of provision." So that if I starve, it must be through forgetfulness, rather than scarcity.

Fare thee well, my good and dear cousin,

Ever yours,

W. C.

XXIX.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Huntingdon, Sept 14, 1765

The longer I live here, the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it. I am upon very good terms with no less than five families, besides two or three odd scrambling fellows like myself. The last acquaintance I made here is with the race of the Unwins, consisting of father and mother, son and daughter, the most comfortable social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age, one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets everything but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen, and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the perusal even of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being and having always been sincere in his belief and love of the Gospel. Another acquaintance I have lately made is with a Mr. Nicholson, a North-country divine, very poor, but very good, and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round; and travels on foot to serve two churches every Sunday through the year, his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. ———, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple (for he is very religious), and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a FOUNTAIN of very fine water,

¹ A popular actor of that time.

about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect timepiece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. ———. He is very much a gentleman, well read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well.

You say, you hope it is not necessary for salvation, to undergo the same afflictions that I have undergone. No! my dear cousin. God deals with His children as a merciful Father; He does not, as He Himself tells us, afflict willingly the sons of men. Doubtless there are many, who, having been placed by His good providence out of the reach of any great evil and the influence of bad example, have from their very infancy been partakers of the grace of His Holy Spirit, in such a manner as never to have allowed themselves in any grievous offence against Him. May you love Him more and more day by day; as every day, while you think upon Him, you will find Him more worthy of your love: and may you be finally accepted with Him for His sake, whose intercession for all His faithful servants cannot but prevail!

Yours ever,
W. C.

XXX.

TO LADY HESKETH

Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765

. . . I am glad you think so favourably of my Huntingdon acquaintance; they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour, before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly she talked a

great deal, and extremely well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease of address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive.

Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should; but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request before I left St. Alban's, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe, with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions are heard even while we are making them; and how delightful to meet with a proof of it in the effectual and actual grant of them! Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means, which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of Scripture, He preserves as the apple of His eye, is a blessing which carries with it the stamp and visible superscription of divine bounty,—a grace unlimited as undeserved; and, like its glorious Author, free in its course, and blessed in its operation!

My dear cousin! health and happiness, and above all, the favour of our great and gracious Lord, attend you! While we seek it in spirit and in truth, we are infinitely more secure of it than of the next breath we expect to draw. Heaven and earth have their destined periods; ten thousand worlds will vanish at the consummation of all things; but the word of God standeth fast; and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded.

My love to all who inquire after me.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

XXXI. TO MAJOR COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, NEAR
HARTFORD

MY DEAR MAJOR,

Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765

. . . Here are three families who have received me with the utmost civility; and two in particular have treated me with as much cordiality as if their pedigrees and mine had grown upon the same sheep-skin. Besides these, there are three or four single men who suit my temper to a hair. The town is one of the neatest in England: the country is fine, for several miles about it; and the roads, which are all turnpike, and strike out four or five different ways, are perfectly good all the year round. I mention this latter circumstance chiefly because my distance from Cambridge has made a horseman of me at last, or at least is likely to do so. My brother and I meet every week, by an alternate reciprocation of intercourse, as Sam Johnson would express it; sometimes I get a lift in a neighbour's chaise, but generally ride. As to my own personal condition, I am much happier than the day is long, and sunshine and candlelight see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, as much company as I choose, a deal of *comfortable leisure*, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought; and I trust that He who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all. I beg you will give my love to my dear cousin Maria, and to everybody at the Park. If Mrs. Maitland is with you, as I suspect by a passage in Lady Hesketh's letter to me, pray remember me to her very affectionately. And believe me, my dear friend, ever yours.

XXXII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Oct. 25, 1765

I am afraid the month of October has proved rather unfavourable to the *belle assemblée* at Southampton; high winds and continual rains being bitter enemies to that agreeable lounge, which you and I are equally fond of. I have very cordially taken myself to my books, and my fireside; and seldom leave them unless for exercise. I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious

civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and I am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have been always apt to do), we are guilty of a very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with. You remember Mr. Gray's stanza:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark untathom'd caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Yours, dear Joe,

W. C.

XXXIII.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Huntingdon, Oct. 20, 1766

I am very sorry for poor Charles's illness, and hope you will soon have cause to thank God for his complete recovery. We have an epidemical fever in this country likewise, which leaves behind it a continual sighing, almost to suffocation; not that I have seen any instance of it, for, blessed be God! our family

have hitherto escaped it, but such was the account I heard of it this morning.

I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here. As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none; the place indeed swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon.¹ We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits adjourn to the garden, where with Mrs. Unwin and her son I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life; above all, for a heart to like it.

I have had many anxious thoughts about taking orders, and

¹ Cards, with what rapture, and the polished die
The yawning chasm of indolence supply!
Then to the dance, and make the sober moon
Witness of joys that shun the sight of noon

Progress of Error, 171-4.

I believe every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularise, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it; indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the meantime, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many endeavours to the truth in a private way, and I hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman.

Yours ever, my dear cousin.

W. C.

XXXIV.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Huntingdon, July 13, 1767

The newspaper has told you the truth. Poor Mr. Unwin being flung from his horse, as he was going to the church on Sunday morning, received a dreadful fracture on the back part of the skull, under which he languished till Thursday evening, and then died. This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits which will not presently be worn off. He died in a poor cottage, to which he was carried immediately after his fall, about a mile from home; and his body could not be brought to his house till the spirit was gone to Him who gave it. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day nor the hour when our Lord cometh!

The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son. We know not yet where we shall settle, but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us, and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers of Helmsley in Yorkshire, and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us, but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my Aunt Madan, to desire Martin to assist us with his inquiries. It is probable we shall stay here till ~~Michaelmas~~

W. C.

4. REMOVAL TO OLNEY—HIS BROTHER'S DEATH

(LETTERS XXXV. TO XLI.)

In the last letter Cowper alludes to Dr. Conyers of Helmsley. It was he who introduced the Rev. John Newton, curate of Olney in Buckinghamshire, to Mrs. Unwin, with the result that she and the poet were persuaded to remove to Olney, where they took up their residence at "Orchard Side," a large red brick house, of which they occupied only a part. After the death of his brother in 1770, Cowper felt less inclined than ever to leave Olney, and he spent much of his time in Newton's society, helping this zealous friend of Whitefield and Wesley in his vigorous parochial campaign against atheism and agnosticism. With him he collaborated in writing the *Olney Hymns*, the publication of which was delayed by another fit of madness in 1773, which incapacitated him for nearly three years. This volume eventually appeared in 1779 and contained about seventy hymns by Cowper, including the well-known favourites—"Hark, my soul," "There is a fountain filled with blood," and "God moves in a mysterious way."

At the beginning of the next year, Newton was presented with a living at St. Mary Woolnoth in the City of London, and fearing that the loss of such an intimate friend would affect Cowper mentally, Mrs. Unwin suggested that he should occupy his mind with writing a moral satire on the *Progress of Error*. Cowper eagerly followed her advice, and the poem, together with its rapidly written successors, *Table Talk*, *Expostulation*, *Hope*, *Charity*, *Conversation* and *Retirement*, were offered for publication to Joseph Johnson, and were printed by him in the spring of 1782.

XXXV.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Olney, June 16, 1768

I thank you for so full an answer to so empty an epistle. If Olney furnished anything for your amusement, you should have it in return; but occurrences here are as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas.

I visited St. Alban's about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually, and make the circumstances of a poor transient half-spent life so insipid and unaffecting, that I have no heart to think or write much about them. Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes,¹ or any other idol, is of little moment to one who hopes and believes that he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God. I thank Him, that He has given me such a deep impressed persuasion of this awful

¹ The rascally but popular editor of the *North Briton*, who was prosecuted his scurrilous attacks on the oppressive government of the day.

truth, as a thousand worlds would not purchase from me. It gives a relish to every blessing, and makes every trouble light.

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

XXXVI.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

May 8, 1770.

Your letter did not reach me till the last post, when I had not time to answer it. I left Cambridge immediately after my brother's death.

I am obliged to you for the particular account you have sent me. * * * * * He to whom I have surrendered myself and all my concerns hath otherwise appointed, and let His will be done. He gives me much which He withholds from others; and if He was pleased to withhold all that makes an outward difference between me and the poor mendicant in the street, it would still become me to say, His Will be done.

It pleased God to cut short my brother's connexions and expectations here, yet not without giving him lively and glorious views of a better happiness than any he could propose to himself in such a world as this. Notwithstanding his great learning (for he was one of the chief men in the university in that respect), he was candid and sincere in his inquiries after truth.¹ Though he could not come into my sentiments when I first acquainted him with them, nor, in the many conversations which I afterward had with him upon the subject, could he be brought to acquiesce in them as scriptural and true, yet I had no sooner left St. Alban's than he began to study with the deepest attention those points in which we differed, and to furnish himself with the best writers upon them. His mind was kept open to conviction for five years, during all which time he laboured in this pursuit with unwearied diligence, as leisure and opportunity were afforded. Amongst his dying words were these, "Brother, I thought you wrong, yet wanted to believe as you did. I found myself not able to believe, yet always thought I should be one day brought to do so." From the study of books, he was brought upon his death-bed to the study of himself, and there learnt to

¹ I had a brother once.

Peace to the memory of a man of worth,
A man of letters and of manners too . . .
He graced a college in which order yet
Was sacred.

renounce his righteousness, and his own most amiable character, and to submit himself to the righteousness which is of God by faith. With these views he was desirous of death. Satisfied of his interest in the blessing purchased by the blood of Christ, he prayed for death with earnestness, felt the approaches of it with joy, and died in peace.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

XXXVII.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Olney, June 7, 1770.

I am obliged to you for sometimes thinking of an unseen friend, and bestowing a letter upon me. It gives me pleasure to hear from you, especially to find that our gracious Lord enables you to weather out the storms you meet with, and to cast anchor within the veil. •

You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord's late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow, that I had lost so near a relation, and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting subject became the same; but much more cause of joy, that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that He had changed his heart, and adopted him into the number of His children. For this I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank Him, because He might have done all that He was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that He enlightens the understandings, and works a gracious change in the hearts of many in their last moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it.

He told me that from the time he was first ordained he began to be dissatisfied with his religious opinions, and to suspect that there were greater things concealed in the Bible than were generally believed or allowed to be there. From the time when I first visited him after my release from St. Alban's, he began to read upon the subject. It was at that time I informed him of the views of divine truth which I had received in that school of affliction. He laid what I said to heart, and began to furnish himself with the best writers upon the controverted points, whose works he read with great diligence and attention, comparing them all the while with the Scripture. None ever truly and ingenuously sought the truth but they found it. A spirit

of earnest inquiry is the gift of God, who never says to any, Seek ye my face in vain. Accordingly, about ten days before his death it pleased the Lord to dispel all his doubts, and to reveal in his heart the knowledge of the Saviour, and to give him firm and unshaken peace in the belief of His ability and willingness to save. As to the affair of the fortune-teller, he never mentioned it to me, nor was there any such paper found as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and had there been such a one, must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman foretold him when he should die. I suppose there may be some truth in the matter, but whatever he might think of it before his knowledge of the truth, and however extraordinary her predictions might really be, I am satisfied that he had then received far other views of the wisdom and majesty of God, than to suppose that he would entrust His secret counsels to a vagrant, who did not mean I suppose to be understood to have received her intelligence from the Fountain of Light, but thought herself sufficiently honoured by any who would give her credit for a secret intercourse of this kind with the Prince of darkness.

Mrs. Unwin is much obliged to you for your kind inquiry after her. She is well, I thank God, as usual, and sends her respects to you. Her son is in the ministry, and has the living of Stock, in Essex. We were last week alarmed with an account of his being dangerously ill; Mrs. Unwin went to see him, and in a few days left him out of danger.

W. C.

XXXVIII.

TO MRS. NEWTON

DEAR MADAM,

March 4, 1780.

. . . The vicarage house became a melancholy object, as soon as Mr. Newton had left it; when you left it, it became more melancholy: now it is actually occupied by another family, I cannot even look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, That used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there; but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change that has taken place; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do; and when Mr. P——¹ goes upstairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr.

¹ Mr. Page, Newton's successor.

Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion; * * * * *. If I were in a condition to leave Olney too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my sepulchre; my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of. . . .

Yours, dear Madam,

W. C.

XXXIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec 21, 1780

. . . If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry (and why not?), then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its colour on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine, to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipt again.

It will not be long before you will receive a poem called the *Progress of Error*. That will be succeeded by another in due time, called *Truth*. Don't be alarmed. I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please.

Yours,

WM. COWPER.

XL.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 13, 1781.

. . . If a board of inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend, that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such should follow, they are not my aim; much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive? I answer, with a bow—Amusement. There is nothing but this—no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, poetry excepted—that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts, which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success, to make an amusement of it. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

XLI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 2, 1781

Fine weather, and a variety of *extraforaneous* occupations (search Johnson's dictionary for that word, and if not found there, insert it—for it saves a deal of circumlocution, and is very lawfully compounded) make it difficult (excuse the length of a parenthesis, which I did not foresee the length of when I began it, and which may perhaps a little perplex the sense of what I am writing, though, as I seldom deal in that figure of speech, I have the less need to make an apology for doing it at present), make it difficult (I say) for me to find opportunities for writing. My morning is engrossed by the garden; and in the afternoon, till I have drunk tea, I am fit for nothing. At five o'clock we walk; and when the walk is over, lassitude recommends rest, and again I become fit for nothing. The current hour therefore which (I need not tell you) is comprised in the interval between four and five, is devoted to your service, as the only one in the twenty-four which is not otherwise engaged. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

5. LADY AUSTEN

(LETTERS XLII-LIII.)

While Cowper was still engaged on his first volume, a new friend entered his life. He was seated at the window one day when he saw two ladies enter a shop on the opposite side of the road. The one was an old acquaintance, Mrs. Jones, the wife of a clergyman who lived at the neighbouring village of Clifton; the other he learnt was her widowed sister, Lady Austen. Cowper was so attracted by the appearance of the stranger that he persuaded Mrs. Unwin to invite the two ladies to tea. Lady Austen and he were soon on the best of terms; she was "Sister Anne" and he was "Brother William." When she left for London it was with the intention of settling her affairs there and returning to Olney for good. She corresponded with the poet, but something that he wrote gave offence and they became temporarily estranged. The breach was soon healed, however, and she came back to Olney, occupying rooms in the vicarage. The three friends—Lady Austen, Mrs. Unwin and Cowper—spent many hours each day in one another's society, the younger lady's vivacity acting as a wonderful tonic on the melancholy poet. She related to him the story of the unfortunate London citizen whom he immortalised as John Gilpin, and she inspired him to begin *The Task* in the following July (1783). Before the publication of this masterpiece, the final rupture between Cowper and Lady Austen took place, due either to Mrs. Unwin's jealousy or to the fact that Lady Austen had fallen in love with the poet, who felt that he could not return her affection. She left Olney soon afterwards and eventually married a Frenchman, M. de Tardif.

XLII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Aug 21, 1781.

. . . Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the greenhouse, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman,¹ his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelve-month she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine)

¹ Cowper's protégé (see Letter No. XXV.).

she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, upon Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene—and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted.

Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

XLIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

August 25, 1781

. . . The solitude, or rather the duality of our condition at Olney, seems drawing to a conclusion. You have not forgot, perhaps, that the building we inhabit consists of two mansions. And because you have only seen the inside of that part of it which is in our occupation, I therefore inform you, that the other end of it is by far the most superb, as well as the most commodious. Lady Austen has seen it, has set her heart upon it, is going to fit it up and furnish it, and if she can get rid of the remaining two years of the lease of her London house, will probably enter upon it in a twelvemonth. You will be pleased with this intelligence, because I have already told you, that she is a woman perfectly well bred, sensible, and in every respect agreeable; and above all, because she loves your mother dearly. It has in my eyes (and I doubt not it will have the same in yours,) strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy of the appellation, comes, recommended by a variety of considerations, to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came, we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected

either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and though a neighbour, is not a very near one. But if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other.

Your mother sends her warm affections, and welcomes into the world the new-born William.

Yours,

My dear friend,

W. C.

XLIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

SEP 26, 1781.

. . . Lady Austen goes to London this day se'nnight. We have told her that you shall visit her; which is an enterprise you may engage in with more alacrity, because as she loves everything that has any connexion with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. Add to this, that your own personal recommendations are by no means small, or such as a woman of her fine taste and discernment can possibly overlook. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one, in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and, if report say true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the most, and the most harmless vivacity you can imagine. In short, she is—what you will find her to be, upon half an hour's conversation with her; and when I hear you have a journey to town in contemplation, I will send you her address.

Your mother is well, and joins with me in wishing that you may spend your time agreeably upon the coast of Sussex.

Yours,

W. C.

XLV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

FEB 9, 1782.

. . . I have a piece of secret history to communicate which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all. When persons for whom I have felt a friendship, disappoint and mortify me

by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured, that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it.

My letters have already apprised you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Ann Street, and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence, and because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained, before I discovered, by some slight intimations of it, that she had conceived displeasure at somewhat I had written, though I cannot now recollect it: conscious of none but the most upright inoffensive intentions, I yet apologised for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence after this proceeded smoothly for a considerable time, but at length having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end, but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter, she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence; it received indeed an answer, but such a one as I could by no means reply to; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting; being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion, and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety, she is a great thinker), induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her

reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as my sister.—*Cen fumus in auras.*

I thank you for the search you have made after my intended motto, but I no longer need it. I have left myself no room for politics, that subject therefore must be postponed to a future letter. Our love is always with yourself and family. We have recovered from the concern we suffered on account of the fracas above-mentioned, though for some days it made us unhappy. Not knowing but that she might possibly become sensible in a few days that she had acted hastily and unreasonably, and renew the correspondence herself, I could not in justice apprise you of this quarrel sooner, but some weeks having passed without any proposals of accommodation, I am now persuaded that none are intended, and in justice to you am obliged to caution you against a repetition of your visit.

Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

XLVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb. 24, 1782.

If I should receive a letter from you to-morrow, you must still remember that I am not in your debt, having paid you by anticipation.—Knowing that you take an interest in my publication, and that you have waited for it with some impatience, I write to inform you that, if it is possible for a printer to be punctual, I shall come forth on the first of March. I have ordered two copies to Stock; one for Mr. John Unwin.—It is possible after all, that my book may come forth without a Preface. Mr. Newton has written (he could indeed write no other) a very sensible as well as a very friendly one; and it is printed. But the bookseller, who knows him well, and esteems him highly, is anxious to have it cancelled, and, with my consent first obtained, has offered to negotiate that matter with the author. He judges, that, though it would serve to recommend the volume to the religious, it would disgust the profane, and that there is in reality no need of any Preface at all. I have found Johnson a very judicious man on other occasions, and am therefore willing that he should determine for me upon this.

Having imparted to you an account of the fracas between us and Lady Austen, it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with every event that bears any relation to that

incident. The day before yesterday she sent me, by her brother-in-law, Mr. Jones, three pair of worked ruffles, with advice that I should soon receive a fourth. I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged, and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate, though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at her feet. This likewise she had previous reason given to expect. Thus stands the affair at present; whether anything in the shape of a reconciliation is to take place hereafter, I know not; but this I know, that when an amicable freedom of intercourse, and that unreserved confidence which belongs only to true friendship, has been once unrooted, plant it again with what care you may, it is very difficult, if not impossible to make it grow. The fear of giving offence to a temper too apt to take it, is unfavourable to that comfort we propose to ourselves even in our ordinary connexions, but absolutely incompatible with the pleasures of real friendship. She is to spend the summer in our neighbourhood, Lady Peterborough and Miss Mordaunt are to be of the party; the former a dissipated woman of fashion, and the latter a haughty beauty. Retirement is our passion and our delight; it is in still life alone we look for that measure of happiness we can rationally expect below. What have we to do therefore with characters like these? shall we go to the dancing-school again? shall we cast off the simplicity of our plain and artless demeanour, to learn, and not in a youthful day neither, the manners of those whose manners at the best are their only recommendation, and yet can in reality recommend them to none, but to people like themselves? This would be folly which nothing but necessity could excuse, and in our case no such necessity can possibly obtain. We will not go into the world, and if the world would come to us, we must give it the French answer—*Monseigneur et Madame ne sont pas visibles*. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

XLVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 7, 1782

We have great pleasure in the contemplation of your Northern journey, as it promises us a sight of you and yours by the way, and are only sorry that Miss Shuttleworth cannot be of the party. A line to ascertain the hour when we may expect you, by the next preceding post, will be welcome.

We are far from wishing a renewal of the connexion we have lately talked about. We did indeed find it in a certain way an agreeable one while that lady continued in the country, yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan, with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression, but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us; occasionally perhaps it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us, whether our former intimacy shall take place again or not; or rather whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think however that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favourable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to a disadvantage; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behaviour, which, though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural, her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

XIVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

1782.

The modest terms in which you express yourself on the subject of Lady Austen's commendation embolden me to add

my suffrage to hers, and to confirm it by assuring you that I think her just and well founded in her opinion of you. The compliment indeed glances at myself; for were you less than she accounts you, I ought not to afford you that place in my esteem which you have held so long. My own sagacity therefore and discernment are not a little concerned upon the occasion, for either you resemble the picture, or I have strangely mistaken my man, and formed an erroneous judgement of his character. With respect to your face and figure indeed, there I leave the ladies to determine, as being naturally best qualified to decide the point; but whether you are perfectly the man of sense, and the gentleman, is a question in which I am as much interested as they, and which, you being my friend, I am of course prepared to settle in your favour. The lady (whom, when you know her as well, you will love as much as we do) is, and has been during the last fortnight, a part of our family. Before she was perfectly restored to health, she returned to Clifton. Soon after she came back, Mr. Jones had occasion to go to London. No sooner was he gone, than the *Château*, being left without a garrison, was besieged as regularly as the night came on. Villains were both heard and seen in the garden, and at the doors and windows. The kitchen window in particular was attempted, from which they took a complete pane of glass, exactly opposite to the iron by which it was fastened; but providentially the window had been nailed to the woodwork, in order to keep it close, and that the air might be excluded; thus they were disappointed, and being discovered by the maid, withdrew. The ladies being worn out with continual watching, and repeated alarms, were at last prevailed upon to take refuge with us. Men furnished with firearms were put into the house, and the rascals having intelligence of this circumstance, beat a retreat. Mr. Jones returned; Mrs. Jones and Miss Green, her daughter, left us, but Lady Austen's spirits having been too much disturbed, to be able to repose in a place where she had been so much terrified, she was left behind. She remains with us till her lodgings at the vicarage can be made ready for her reception. I have now sent you what has occurred of moment in our history since my last. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

XLIX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Jan. 19, 1783.

Not to retaliate, but for want of opportunity, I have delayed writing. From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement, we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement; not that our society is much multiplied—the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately in each other's *château*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions, and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant, and beg to be excused. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

L.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

July 12, 1784.

. . . You are going to Bristol. A lady, not long since our very neighbour, is probably there: she *was* there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connexion on some accounts an inconvenient one, that we do not wish to renew it, and conduct yourself accordingly. A character with which we spend all our time should be made on purpose for us; too much or too little of any single ingredient spoils all: in the instance in question, the dissimilitude was too great not to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant. We have reason, however, to believe that she has given up all thoughts of a return to Olney. . . .

Yours ever,

W. C.

LI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

. . . I enclose a letter from Lady Austen, which I beg you to return to me in your next. Her sister was the bearer of it. We are reconciled. She seized the first opportunity to embrace

your mother with tears of the tenderest affection, and I of course am satisfied. We were all a little awkward at first, but now are as easy as ever. She stays at Clifton till after Christmas. Having been obliged to communicate our disagreement, I give myself a release from that obligation of secrecy, under which I am engaged with respect to her other letters, accounting this, indeed, no part of our correspondence.

Yours,

WM. COWPER.

LII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Aug. 27, 1784

The last four days have been days of adventure, teeming with incidents in which the opposite ingredients of pain and pleasure have been plentifully mingled, and of the most interesting kind. Lady Austen's behaviour to us ever since her return to Clifton has been such as to engage our affections to her more than ever. A flood, indeed, has sometimes parted us for many days; but though it has often been impossible for us, who never ride to visit *her*, as soon as the water has become fordable by an ass, she has mounted one, and visited *us*. On Thursday last, in the evening, she came down with her sister to the evening lecture. She had not been long seated in her pew before she was attacked by the most excruciating pains of bilious colic: having much resolution, however, and being determined not to alarm her sister, the congregation, or the minister, she bore it without discovering much of what she felt even to Mrs. Jones till the service was over. It is a disorder to which she has lately been very subject. We were just sitting down to supper, when a hasty rap alarmed us. I ran to the hall window, for the hares being loose, it was impossible to open the door. The evening had been a dismal one, raining almost continually, but just at that time it held up. I entreated Mrs. Jones to go round to the gate, and, understanding by her tremulous voice that something distressful was at hand, made haste to meet her. I had no sooner reached the yard door, and opened it, than Lady Austen appeared leaning upon Mr. Scott. She could not speak, but thrusting her other arm under mine, with much difficulty made shift to attain the great chair by the fireside in the parlour; there she suffered unutterable anguish for a considerable time, till at length, by your mother's application and assistance, being a little relieved, she contrived to climb the staircase, and after about three hours'

agony was put to bed. At eleven at night we sent off a messenger to Northampton, who returned at seven the next morning, and brought a physician with him. He prescribed, and she was better. Friday night she slept tolerably, rose cheerful, and entertained us all Saturday with much agreeable conversation as usual; but her spirits being too great for her strength, the consequence was a frightful hysteric fit, which seized her just as she was going to bed. She was alone, for her sister had been obliged to go home; and thinking there was no need of such a precaution, she would have nobody else to sleep with her. The appointed signal was, that she should knock if she wanted anything. She did so; your mother hastened to the chamber, and I after her to know if I could be of any use. She had not begun to undress, so I was admitted; and soon after her disorder became quite convulsive, accompanied with most of the symptoms of the most violent fits of that sort I have ever seen. In about an hour she grew better, rested tolerably, and was in good spirits on Sunday, and last night well enough to return to Clifton upon the ass. To-day we dine there.

Are you curious to know her sentiments of *you*? The question has, no doubt, excited your curiosity if you had none before. Suppose, however, I postpone the gratification of it, and make it part of my next letter, finishing this with something more important? No; you must be satisfied this moment: no man that merits the good opinion of others can be indifferent to it. You shall then.

She would have known you for your mother's son the moment she saw you, had you not been announced by name. This is some praise, let me tell you, especially from her, who thinks that mother the best of women, and loves her at least as much as if she were her own. Your figure the most elegant she ever saw—no longer complain of calfless legs, and a belly with nothing in it—your countenance quite handsome—no longer be ashamed of a nose you have sometimes thought too long!—every motion of your limbs, your action, your attitude, bespeak the gentleman—added to all this, your vivacity and your good sense, together with an amiable disposition, which she is sure you possess, though she has but an hour's knowledge of you, have placed you so high in her esteem, that had you an opportunity to cultivate an interest there, you would soon be without a rival. Fourteen years ago I would not have made you this relation; such a stripling as you were at that time would have been spoiled by so much praise, and through the mere hunger

after more would have lost what he had acquired already; but being the father of a family, and the minister of three parishes, I am not afraid to trust you with it. I beg Mrs. Unwin will add a short postscript to your next, just to inform me whether, when you perused this picture of yourself, you blushed, and how often. I had almost forgot what she desired me to insert, that she wishes as much for a Mr. Unwin here, as you can possibly for a Lady Austen at Stock.

Notwithstanding the uncommon rigour of the season, much of our wheat is carried, and in good condition. It does not appear that the murmurings of the farmers were with any reason: the corn has suffered much less by mildew than was reported; and if it is at all injured (in this part of the world at least), it must be ascribed to their foolish impatience, who *would* cut it down too soon. It is so cold this 27th of August that I shake in the greenhouse where I am writing.

Our united love attends you all. Your letter is gone to Dewsbury.

Yours, my dear William,

WM. C.

LIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Mond, Feb 27, 1786.

. . . All intercourse has ceased between us and Lady Austen almost these two years. This mystery shall also be accounted for when you come. She has left Bristol, and is at present settled within a mile of us with her sister. You are candid, and will give me credit when I say that the fault is not with us.

I have disposed of thirty-three papers of Proposals—even I. Mr. Throckmorton has most obligingly given me his name, and has undertaken the disposal of twelve. Lord Archibald Hamilton has also subscribed, at the instance of a neighbour of mine, and does me the honour to say that he subscribes with pleasure. Adieu, my beloved cousin; thank you for all your welcome intelligence. I had need of it.

Yours most truly,

WM. COWPER.

6. REMAINING YEARS AT OLNEY

(LETTERS LIV.—LXV.)

After Lady Austen's departure Cowper felt lonely for a time. He had already been introduced by Newton to the Rev. William Bull, and he soon became intimate with the Throckmortons, a Roman Catholic family residing at Weston, about a mile from Olney. The publication of his poems had brought him again to the notice of his relatives and he was delighted, one morning in October 1785, to receive a communication from his cousin, Lady Harriet Hesketh, now a widow. Their correspondence was renewed and to her he communicated the secret intelligence that he was translating Homer. She proposed to visit Cowper, and after some delay occasioned by her father's illness, she arrived at Olney in June 1786. Meanwhile, her sister Theodora had not forgotten her former lover, and although she preferred to remain anonymous, there is little doubt that the gifts that the poet received came from her.

LIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Mon aimable et très cher Ami,

Oct 27, 1782.

It is not in the power of chaises or chariots to carry you where my affections will not follow you; if I heard that you were gone to finish your days in the Moon, I should not love you the less; but should contemplate the place of your abode, as often as it appeared in the heavens, and say—Farewell, my friend, for ever! Lost! but not forgotten! Live happy in thy lantern, and smoke the remainder of thy pipes in peace! Thou art rid of Earth, at least of all its cares, and so far can I rejoice in thy removal; and as to the cares that are to be found in the Moon, I am resolved to suppose them lighter than those below; heavier they can hardly be.

I have never since I saw you failed to inquire of all the few that were likely to inform me, whether you were sick or abroad, for I have long wondered at your long silence and your long absence. I believe it was Mr. Jones who told me that you were gone from home. I suppose, therefore, that you have been at Ramsgate, and upon that condition I excuse you; but you should have remembered, my friend, that people do not go to the seaside to bring back with them pains in the bowels and such weakness and lassitude as you complain of. You ought to have returned ten years younger, with your nerves well braced and your spirits at the top of the weather-glass. Come to us, however, and Mrs. Unwin shall add her attentions and her skill to those

of Mrs. Bull; and we will give you broth to heal your bowels, and toasted rhubarb to strengthen them, and send you back as brisk and as cheerful as we wish you to be always.

Both your advice and your manner of giving it are gentle and friendly, and like yourself. I thank you for them, and do not refuse your counsel because it is not good, or because I dislike it, but because it is not for me; there is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yes, and praise too, even in the belly of this hell, compared with which Jonah's was a palace, a temple of the living God. But let me add, there is no encouragement in the Scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it; you would agree with me if you could. And yet the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed, you would account no sin, you would even tell me that it was a duty. This is strange—you will think me mad—but I am not mad, most noble Festus, I am only in despair, and those powers of mind which I possess are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing upon my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ever ask it again. Yet I love you, and such as you, and determine to enjoy your friendship while I can—it will not be long, we must soon part for ever.

Madame Guyon is finished, but not quite transcribed. Mrs. Unwin, who has lately been much indisposed, unites her love to you with mine, and we both wish to be affectionately remembered to Mrs. Bull and the young gentleman.

Yours, my friend,

WM. COWPER.

LV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Jan 13, 1734.

I too have taken leave of the old year, and parted with it just when you did, but with very different sentiments and feelings upon the occasion. I looked back upon all the passages and occurrences of it, as a traveller looks back upon a wilderness, through which he has passed with weariness, and sorrow of heart, reaping no other fruit of his labour than the poor con-

solation that, dreary as the desert was, he has left it all behind him. The traveller would find even this comfort considerably lessened, if, as soon as he had passed one wilderness, another of equal length, and equally desolate, should expect him. In this particular, his experience and mine would exactly tally. I should rejoice indeed that the old year is over and gone, if I had not every reason to prophesy a new one similar to it.

The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit the nearer home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes everything, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoken no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest

upon my mind with a weight of immoveable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus? why crippled and made useless in the church, just at that time of life, when, my judgement and experience being matured, I might be most useful? why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost—till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer:—God's ways are mysterious, and He giveth no account of His matters:—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.

Yours,

W. C.
M. U.

LVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is hard upon us striplings who have uncles still living (N.B. I myself have an uncle still alive), that those venerable gentlemen should stand in our way, even when the ladies are in question; that I, for instance, should find in one page of your letter a hope that Miss Shuttleworth would be of your party, and be told in the next that she is engaged to your uncle. Well, we may perhaps never be uncles; but we may reasonably hope that the time is coming, when others, as young as we are now, shall envy us the privileges of old age, and see us engross that share in the attention of the ladies to which their youth must aspire in vain. Make our compliments if you please to your sister Elizabeth, and tell her that we are both mortified at having missed the pleasure of seeing her.

Balloons are so much the mode, that even in this country we have attempted a balloon. You may possibly remember that at a place called Weston, little more than a mile from Olney, there lives a family whose name is Throckmorton. The present possessor of the estate is a young man whom I remember a boy.¹ He has a wife, who is young, genteel, and handsome. They are Papists, but much more amiable than many Protestants. We never had any intercourse with the family, though ever since we lived here we have enjoyed the range of their pleasure-grounds, having been favoured with a key, which admits us into all. When this man succeeded to the estate, on the death of

¹ John Courtenay Throckmorton.

his elder brother,¹ and came to settle at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by the favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us. A fortnight ago, I received an invitation in the civilest terms, in which he told me that the next day he should attempt to fill a balloon, and if it would be any pleasure to me to be present, should be happy to see me. Your mother and I went. The whole country were there, but the balloon could not be filled. The endeavour was, I believe, very philosophically made, but such a process depends for its success upon such niceties as make it very precarious. Our reception was, however, flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us, than we could have possibly expected; indeed rather more than any of his other guests. They even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged. A day or two afterwards, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both—a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain, insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one. A few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and curtsies at a little distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the courtyard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented us to the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part,

¹ Referred to as Benevolus in *The Task*, I. 262-3:

"Thanks to Benevolus; he spares me yet
These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines."

as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call, and now and then to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way, neither our house, furniture, servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry, which must be the consequence of our dining there, there not being a man in the country, except himself, with whom I could endure to associate. They are squires, merely such, purse-proud and sportsmen. But Mr. T. is altogether a man of fashion, and respectable on every account.

I have told you a long story. Farewell. We number the days as they pass, and are glad that we shall see you and your sister soon.

Yours, etc.,
W. C.

LVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Oct. 12, 1785

It is no new thing with you to give pleasure, but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more, are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured, that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment, but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the

Arabian Nights Entertainment, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that serves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I should remember him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof, that he could give, of a judgement that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me: that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularise only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's¹ good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's

¹ Ashley Cowper.

felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which I suppose may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.

Yours, my dear friend, and cousin,

W. C.

LVIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 3, 1785.

I am glad to hear that there is such a demand for your last Narrative. If I may judge of their general utility by the effect that they have heretofore had upon me, there are few things more edifying than death-bed memoirs. They interest every reader, because they speak of a period at which all must arrive, and afford a solid ground of encouragement to survivors to expect the same, or similar support and comfort, when it shall be their turn to die.

I also am employed in writing narrative, but not so useful. Employment, however, and with the pen, is, through habit, become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished *The Task*, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the *Iliad*; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception

of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect thus: The Iliad and the Odyssey together consists of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The *literati* are all agreed to a man, that although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connexions, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote; but, among your numerous connexions, it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will.

I have lately had three visits from my old schoolfellow Mr.

Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot, and of Mr. Chester of Chicheley. At his last visit he brought his wife with him, a most amiable woman, to see Mrs. Unwin. I told him my purpose, and my progress. He received the news with great pleasure; immediately subscribed a draft of twenty pounds; and promised me his whole heart, and his whole interest, which lies principally among people of the first fashion.

My correspondence has lately also been renewed with my dear cousin Lady Hesketh, whom I ever loved as a sister (for we were in a manner brought up together), and who writes to me as affectionately as if she were so. She also enters into my views and interests upon this occasion with a warmth that gives me great encouragement. The circle of *her* acquaintance is likewise very extensive; and I have no doubt that she will exert her influence to its utmost possibilities among them. I have other strings to my bow (perhaps, as a translator of Homer, I should say, to my lyre), which I cannot here enumerate; but, upon the whole, my prospect seems promising enough. I have not yet consulted Johnson upon the occasion, but intend to do it soon.

My spirits are somewhat better than they were. In the course of the last month, I have perceived a very sensible amendment. The hope of better days seems again to dawn upon me; and I have now and then an intimation, though slight and transient, that God has not abandoned me for ever. . . .

The morning is beautiful, and tempts me forth into the garden. It is all the walk that I can have at this season, but not all the exercise. I ring a peal every day upon the dumb-bells.

I am, my dear friend, most truly,

Yours and Mrs. Newton's,

W. C.

LIX.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Thursday evening, Dec. 8, 1785.

Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the compactest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that ever were or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most, is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherrington, when the waggoner's wife (for the man himself was not at home), croaked out her abominable *No*! yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such an *ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious

cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me, I have nothing to render you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now, however, only room to say that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more at this distance but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I? The pocket-book is also the completest that I ever saw, and the watch-chain the most brilliant.

Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer.

My dear, yours,
WM. C.

N.B.—I generally write the day before the post sets out, which is the thing that puzzles you. I do it that I may secure time for the purpose, and may not be hurried. On this very day twenty-two years ago left I London.

LX.

TO LADY HESKETH

DEAREST COUSIN,

Thursday, Dec. 15, 1785

My desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all my objections. Before it arrived, Mrs. Unwin had spied out for it a place that exactly suits it. A certain fly-table in the corner of the room, which I had overlooked, affords it a convenient stand when it is not wanted, and it is easily transferred to a larger when it is. If I must not know to whom I am principally indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgements of gratitude and love. As to my frequent use of it, I will tell you how that matter stands. When I was writing my first volume, and was just but beginning to emerge from a state of melancholy that had continued some years, (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered,) Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies insist, you know, there is an end of the business; obedience on our part becomes necessary. I accordingly obeyed, but having lost my fiddle, I became pen-sive and unhappy; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility, and from that day to this I have never ceased to

scrape. Observe, however, my dear, that I scrape not always. My task that I assign myself is to translate forty lines a day; if they pass off easily I sometimes make them fifty, but never abate any part of the allotted number. Perhaps I am occupied an hour and a half, perhaps three hours; but generally between two and three. This, you see, is labour that can hurt no man; and what I have translated in the morning, in the evening I transcribe. . . .

With true affection yours,
WM. COWPER.

LXI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Dec. 31, 1785

You have learned from my last that I am now conducting myself upon the plan that you recommended to me in the summer. But since I wrote it, I have made still farther advances in my negotiation with Johnson. The proposals are adjusted. The proof-sheet has been printed off, corrected, and returned. They will be sent abroad as soon as I can make up a complete list of the personages and persons to whom I would have them sent; which in a few days I hope to be able to accomplish. Johnson behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours, in his own words, "to put something handsome in my pocket." and recommends two large quartos for the whole. He would not (he says) by any means advise an extravagant price, and has fixed it at three guineas; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. Five hundred names (he adds) at this price will put above a thousand pounds into my purse. I am doing my best to obtain them. I have written, I think, to all my quondam friends, except those that are dead, requiring their assistance. I have gulped and swallowed, and I have written to the Chancellor, and I have written to Colman. I now bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially if so disposed. Mr. Newton is warm in my service, and can do not a little. I have of course written to Mr. Bagot, who, when he was here, with much earnestness and affection entreated me so to do, as soon as I should have settled the conditions. If I could get Sir Richard Sutton's address, I would write to him also, though I have been but once in his company

since I left Westminster, where he and I read the Iliad and Odyssey through together. I enclose Lord Dartmouth's¹ answer to my application, which I will get you to show to Lady Hesketh, because it will please her. I shall be glad if you can make an opportunity to call on her, during your present stay in town. You observe therefore that I am not wanting to myself; he that is so, has no just claim on the assistance of others, neither shall myself have any cause to complain of me in other respects. I thank you for your friendly hints, and precautions, and shall not fail to give them the guidance of my pen. I respect the public, and I respect myself, and had rather want bread than expose myself wantonly to the condemnation of either. I hate the affectation so frequently found in authors, of negligence and slovenly slightness; and in the present case am sensible how especially necessary it is to shun them, when I undertake the vast and invidious labour of doing better than Pope has done before me. I thank you for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability, when the Mann you mention applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples, but of verse never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed. . . .

Adieu,

W. C.

LXII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Jan 16, 1786.

. . . You do not ask me, my dear, for an explanation of what I could mean by *anguish of mind*, and by the *perpetual interruptions* that I mentioned. Because you *do not* ask, and because your reason for not asking consists of a delicacy and tenderness peculiar to yourself, for that very cause I will tell you. A wish so suppressed is more irresistible than many wishes plainly uttered. Know then that in the year 73 the same scene that was

¹ Another old schoolfellow, and Newton's patron. He is referred to in *Fruth*, 377-8:

"We boast some rich ones whom the Gospel sways,
And one who wears a coronet and prays."

acted at St. Alban's, opened upon me again at Olney, only covered with a still deeper shade of melancholy, and ordained to be of much longer duration. I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding to an almost childish imbecility. I did not indeed lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer even to a difficult question, but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehension of things and persons that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that every body hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all; was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp. I would not be more circumstantial than is necessary. Dr. Cotton was consulted. He replied that he could do no more for me than might be done at Olney, but recommended particular vigilance, lest I should attempt my life:—a caution for which there was the greatest occasion. At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's aversion to me, I could endure no other companion. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had; she performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before, very much to the hurt of her own constitution. It will be thirteen years in little more than a week, since this malady seized me. Methinks I hear you ask,—your affection for me will, I know, make you wish to do so,—Is it removed? I reply, in great measure, but not quite. Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and I think less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better however as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelve-month, and addressed myself to the making of birdcages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with that of drawing, but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I

have given you, my dear, a little history in shorthand; I know that it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. *In the year when I wrote "The Task"* (for it occupied me about a year), *I was very often most supremely unhappy*, and am under God indebted in good part to that work for not having been much worse. You did not know what a clever fellow I am, and how I can turn my hand to anything.

I perceive that this time I shall make you pay double postage, and there is no help for it. Unless I write myself out now, I shall forget half of what I have to say. Now therefore for the interruptions at which I hinted.—There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed, our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls¹ above-said; by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all, a measure the rather expedient, because, in winter the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my particular business, (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second,) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began *The Task*,—for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten, and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could

¹ These doors had already been made in Unwin's time, so that Cowper and Unwin could pass from one garden to the other across the "Guinea Field," so called because each paid one guinea a year for the right of way.

secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy: long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect *The Task* to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health, and before I quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely understand me perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add therefore, that having paid my morning visit, I walked; returning from my walk, I dressed; we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night. . . .

I know well, my cousin, how formidable a creature you are when you become once outrageous. No sprat in a storm is half so terrible. But it is all in vain. You are at a distance, so we snap our fingers at you. Not that we have any more fowls at present. No, no; you may make yourself easy upon that subject. The coop is empty, and at this time of year cannot be replenished. But the spring will soon begin to advance. There are such things as eggs in the world, which eggs will, by incubation, be transformed, some of them into chickens, and others of them into ducklings. So muster up all your patience, for as sure as you live, if we live also, we shall put it to the trial. But seriously, you must not deny us one of the greatest pleasures we can have, which is, to give you now and then a little tiny proof how much we value you. We cannot sit with our hands before us, and be contented with only saying that we love Lady Hesketh.

The little item that you inserted in your cover, concerning a review of a certain author's work, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, excited Mrs. Unwin's curiosity to see it in a moment. In vain did I expostulate with her on the vanity of all things here below, especially of human praise, telling her what perhaps indeed she had heard before, but what on such an occasion I thought it not amiss to remind her of, that at the best it is but as the idle wind that whistles as it passes by, and that a little attention to the dictates of reason would presently give her the victory over all the curiosity that she felt so troublesome. For a short time, indeed, I prevailed, but the next day the fit returned upon her with more violence than before. She would see it,—she was resolved that she would see it that moment. You must know, my dear, that a watchmaker lives within two or three doors of

us, who takes in the said Magazine for a gentleman at some distance, and as it happened it had not been sent to its proper owner. Accordingly the messenger that the lady dispatched, returned with it, and she was gratified. As to myself, I read the article indeed, and read it to her; but I do not concern myself much you may suppose about such matters, and shall only make two or three cursory remarks, and so conclude. In the first place therefore, I observe, that it is enough to craze a poor poet to see his verses so miserably misprinted, and which is worse if possible, his very praises in a manner annihilated, by a jumble of the lines out of their places, so that in two instances, the end of the period takes the lead of the beginning of it. The said poet has still the more reason to be crazed, because the said Magazine is in general singularly correct. But at Christmas, no doubt your printer will get drunk as well as another man. It is astonishing to me that they know so exactly how much I translated of Voltaire. My recollection refreshed by them tells me that they are right in the number of the books that they affirm to have been translated by me, but till they brought the fact again to my mind, I myself had forgotten that part of the business entirely. My brother had twenty guineas for eight books of English *Henriade*, and I furnished him with four of them. They are not equally accurate in the affair of the Tame Mouse. That I kept one is certain, and that I kept it as they say, in my bureau,—but not in the Temple. It was while I was at Westminster. I kept it till it produced six young ones, and my transports when I first discovered them cannot easily be conceived,—any more than my mortification, when going again to visit my little family, I found that mouse herself had eaten them! I turned her loose, in indignation, and vowed never to keep a mouse again. Who the writer of this article can be, I am not able to imagine, nor where he had his information of these particulars. But they know all the world and everything that belongs to it. The mistake that has occasioned the mention of Unwin's name in the margin would be ludicrous if it were not, inadvertently indeed, and innocently on their part, profane. I should have thought it impossible that when I spoke of One who had been wounded in the hands and in the side, any reader in a Christian land could have been for a moment at a loss for the person intended.

Adieu, my dear cousin; I intended that one of these should have served as a case for the other, but before I was aware of it, I filled both sheets completely. However, as your money burns

in your pocket, there is no harm done. I shall not add a syllable more except that I am and, while I breathe, ever shall be

Most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

Yes; one syllable more. Having just finished the *Iliad*, I was determined to have a deal of talk with you.

LXIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR,

Olney, Monday, Jan. 23, 1786.

Anonymous is come again;—may God bless him. whosoever he be, as I doubt not that He will. A certain person said on a certain occasion (and He never spoke a word that failed), Whoso giveth you a cup of cold water in my name, shall by no means lose his reward. Therefore anonymous as he chooses to be upon earth, his name, I trust, will hereafter be found written in heaven. But when great princes, or characters much superior to great princes, choose to be incog, it is a sin against decency and good manners to seem to know them. I therefore know nothing of Anonymous, but that I love him heartily and with most abundant cause. Had I opportunity I would send you his letter, though, yourself excepted, I would indulge none with a sight of it. To confide it to *your* hands will be no violation of the secrecy that he has enjoined himself, and consequently me. But I can give you a short summary of its purport.—After an introduction of a religious cast, which does great honour to himself, and in which he makes a humble comparison between himself and me, by far too much to my advantage, he proceeds to tell me that being lately in company where my last work was mentioned, mention was also made of my intended publication. He informs me of the different sentiments of the company on that subject, and expresses his own in terms the most encouraging; but adds, that having left the company, and shut himself up in his chamber, an apprehension there seized him, lest, if perhaps the world should enter into my views of the matter, and the work should come short of the success that I hope for, the mortification might prove too much for my health; yet thinks that even in that case I may comfort myself by adverting to similar instances of failure where the writer's genius would have insured success, if any thing could have insured it, and alludes in particular to the fate and fortune of the *Paradise Lost*. In the last place he

gives his attention to my circumstances, takes the kindest notice of their narrowness, and makes me a present of an annuity of fifty pounds a year, wishing that it were five hundred pounds. In a P.S. he tells me, a small parcel will set off by the Wellingborough coach on Tuesday next, which he hopes will arrive safe. I have given you the bones, but the benignity and affection which is the marrow of those bones, in so short an abridgement, I could not give you. Wonder with me, my beloved cousin, at the goodness of God, who, according to Dr. Watts's beautiful stanza,

—can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night,
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight.

. . . My ever beloved cousin, adieu.

Perfectly yours,
W. C.

LXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, Jan. 31, 1786.

It is very pleasant, my dearest cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself, therefore, driven by stress of necessity to the following resolution, viz. that I will constitute you my Thank-receiver-general for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the foreground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*¹; and below with these, *Tiney, Puss, and Bess*.² For all and every of these I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you, that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand.—There! Now I am a little easier.

I have almost conceived a design to send up half a dozen stout country fellows to tie by the leg to their respective bed-

¹ A ruined cottage mentioned in *The Task*, I. 227:

"I call the low-roofed lodge the *peasant's nest*."

² The names of Cowper's three pet hares.

posts the company that so abridges your opportunity of writing to me. Your letters are the joy of my heart, and I cannot endure to be robbed, by I know not whom, of half my treasure. But there is no comfort without a drawback, and therefore it is that I, who have unknown friends, have unknown enemies also. Ever since I wrote last I find myself in better health, and my nocturnal spasms and fever considerably abated. I intend to write to Dr. Kerr on Thursday, that I may gratify him with an account of my amendment; for to him I know that it will be a gratification. Were he not a physician, I should regret that he lives so distant, for he is a most agreeable man; but being what he is, it would be impossible to have his company, even if he were a neighbour, unless in time of sickness; at which time, whatever charms he might have himself, my own must necessarily lose much of their effect on him. . . .

May God have you in His keeping, my beloved cousin.

Farewell.

W. C.

LXV.

TO LADY HESKETH

June 12, 1786.

I am neither young nor superannuated, yet I am a child. When I had read your letter I grumbled:—not at you, my dearest cousin, for you are in no fault, but at the whole generation of coach-makers, as you may suppose, and at yours in particular. I foresaw and foreknew that he would fail in his promise, and yet was disappointed; was, in truth, no more prepared for what I expected with so much reason, than if I had not at all expected it. I grumbled till we went to dinner, and at intervals till we had dined; and when dinner was over, with very little encouragement, I could actually have cried. And if I had, I should in truth have thought them tears as well bestowed as most that I have shed for many years. At first I numbered months, then weeks, then days, and was just beginning to number hours, and now I am thrown back to days again. My first speech was, after folding up your letter, (for I will honestly tell you all,) I am crazed with Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and St. Alban's, and Totteridge, and Hadley. When is she to set out?—When is she to be here? Do tell me, for perhaps, you understand it better than I. Why, says Mrs. Unwin, (with much more composure in her air than properly belonged to her, for she had also her feelings on the occasion,) she sets out to-morrow se'nnight, and will be here on the Wednesday after. And who knows that? replied I; will the coachmaker be at all more punctual in repair-

ing the old carriage, than in making the new one? For my part, I have no hope of seeing her this month; and if it be possible, I will not think of it, lest I should be again disappointed. And to say the truth, my dear, though hours have passed since I thus said, and I have had time for cooler consideration, the suspicion still sticks close to me, that more delays may happen. A philosopher would prepare himself for such an event, but I am no philosopher, at least when the comfort of seeing you is in question. I believe in my heart that there have been just as many true philosophers upon earth, as there have been men that have had little or no feeling, and not one more. Swift truly says—

Indifference clad in reason's guise,
All want of fortitude supplies.

When I wake in the night, I feel my spirits the lighter because you are coming. When I am not at Troy, I am either occupied in the recollection of a thousand passages of my past life, in which you were a partaker with me, or conversing about you with Mrs. Unwin. Thus my days and nights have been spent principally ever since you determined upon this journey, and especially, and almost without interruption from any other subject, since the time of your journey has seemed near at hand. While I despaired, as I did for many years, that I should ever see you more, I thought of you, indeed, and often, but with less solicitude. I used to say to myself; Providence has so ordered it, and it is my duty to submit. He has cast me at a distance from her, and from all whom I once knew. He did it, and not I; it is He who has chosen my situation for me. Have I not reason to be thankful that, since He designed me to pass a part of my life, and no inconsiderable one neither, in a state of the deepest melancholy, He appointed me a friend in Mrs. Unwin, who should share all my sorrows with me, and watch over me in my helpless condition, night and day? What, and where had I been without her? Such considerations were sufficient to reconcile me at that time to perpetual separation even from you, because perpetual I supposed it must be, and without remedy. But now every hour of your absence seems long, for this very natural reason, because the same Providence has given me a hope that you will be present with me soon. A good that seems at an immeasurable distance, and that we cannot hope to reach, has therefore the less influence on our affections. But the same good brought nearer, made to appear practicable, promised to our hopes, and almost in possession, engages all our faculties and

desires. All this is according to the natural and necessary course of things in the human heart; and the philosophy that would interfere with it, is folly at least, if not frenzy. A throne has at present but little sensible attraction for me. And why? Perhaps only because I know that should I break my heart with wishes for a throne, I should never reach one. But did I know assuredly that I should put on a crown to-morrow, perhaps I too should feel ambition, and account the interposing night tedious. The sum of the whole matter, my dear, is this: that this villainous coach-maker has mortified me monstrously, and that I tremble lest he should do so again. From you I have no fears. I see in your letter, and all the way through it, what pains you take to assure me and give me comfort. I am and will be comforted for that very reason; and will wait still other ten days with all the patience that I can muster. You, I know, will be punctual if you can, and that at least is matter of real consolation.

I approve altogether, my cousin beloved, of your sending your goods to the waggon on Saturday, and cookee by the coach on Tuesday. She will be here perhaps by four in the afternoon, at the latest by five, and will have quite time enough to find out all the cupboards and shelves in her department before you arrive. But I declare and protest that cookee shall sleep that night at our house, and get her breakfast here next morning. You will break her heart, child, if you send her into a strange house where she will find nothing that has life but the curate, who has not much neither. Servant he keeps none. A woman makes his bed, and after a fashion as they say, dresses his dinner, and then leaves him to his lucubrations. I do therefore insist on it, and so does Mrs. Unwin, that cookee shall be our guest for that time; and from this we will not depart. I tell thee besides, that I shall be more glad to see her, than ever I was in my life to see one whom I never saw before. Guess why, if you can.

You must number your miles fifty-six instead of fifty-four. The fifty-sixth mile ends but a few yards beyond the vicarage. Soon after you shall have entered Olney, you will find an opening on your right hand. It is a lane that leads to your dwelling. There your coach may stop and set down Mrs. Eaton; when she has walked about forty yards she will spy a green gate and rails on her left hand; and when she has opened the gate and reached the house-door, she will find herself at home. But we have another *manceuvre* to play off upon you, and in which we positively will not be opposed, or if we are, it shall be to no purpose. I have an honest fellow that works in my garden, his name is

Kitchener, and we call him Kitch for brevity. He is sober, and as trusty as the day. He has a smart blue coat, that when I had worn it some years, I gave him, and he has now worn it some years himself. I shall set him on horseback, and order him to the Swan at Newport,¹ there to wait your arrival, and if you should not stop at that place, as perhaps you may not, immediately to throw himself into your suite, and to officiate as your guide. For though the way from Newport hither is short, there are turnings that might puzzle your coachman; and he will be of use too, in conducting you to our house, which otherwise you might not easily find, partly through the stupidity of those of whom you might inquire, and partly from its out-of-the-way situation. My brother drove up and down Olney in quest of us, almost as often as you up and down Chancery Lane in quest of the Madans, with fifty boys and girls at his tail, before he could find us. The first man, therefore, you shall see in a blue coat with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry Kitch! He will immediately answer, My Lady! and from that moment you are sure not to be lost.

Your house shall be as clean as scrubbing and dry-rubbing can make it, and in all respects fit you to receive. My friend the Quaker, in all that I have seen of his doings, has acquitted himself much to my satisfaction. Some little things, he says, will perhaps be missing at first, in such a multiplicity, but they shall be produced as soon as called for. Mrs. U. has bought you six ducks, and is fattening them for you. She has also rummaged up a coop that will hold six chickens, and designs to people it for you by the first opportunity; for these things are not to be got fit for the table at Olney. Thus, my dear, are all things in the best train possible, and nothing remains but that you come and show yourself. Oh, that moment! Shall we not both enjoy it? --That we shall.

I have received an anonymous complimentary Pindaric Ode from a little poet who calls himself a schoolboy. I send you the first stanza by way of specimen. You shall see it all soon.

TO WM. COWPER, OF THE INNER TEMPLE, ESQ.

ON HIS POEMS IN THE SECOND VOLUME

In what high strains, my Muse, wilt thou
Attempt great Cowper's worth to show?
Pindaric strains shall tune the lyre,
And 'twould require
A Pindar's fire

¹ Newport Pagnell, about five miles from Olney.

To sing great Cowper's worth,
The lofty bard, delightful sage,
Ever the wonder of the age,
And blessing to the earth.

Adieu, my precious cousin, your lofty bard and delightful sage expects you with all possible affection.

Ever yours,
WM. COWPER.

I am truly sorry for your poor friend Burrows!

Our dinner hour is four o'clock. We will not surfeit you with delicacies; of that be assured. I know your palate, and am glad to know that it is easily pleased. Were it other than it is, it would stand but a poor chance to be gratified at Olney. I undertake for lettuce and cucumber, and Mrs. U. for all the rest. If she feeds you too well, you must humble her.

7. AT WESTON. OLD AND NEW FRIENDS

(LETTERS LXVI.—LXXXVII.)

Lady Hesketh, although she was satisfied with Cowper's mode of life at Olney, nevertheless soon determined that he should move to more cheerful surroundings at Weston, where Mrs. Unwin and he rented a house from their friends and neighbours, the Throckmortons. A terrible blow befell them the next year, 1787, when William Unwin suddenly died of typhus fever, which he had contracted from a friend. But although Lady Hesketh was no longer with them, old friends like Bull rallied round the grief-stricken couple, and Samuel Rose, a young graduate from Glasgow on his way home to London, paid a visit to Cowper and became a life-long friend and a great comfort to him. This year saw Cowper the prey to another serious attack of insanity, and his determined attempt at suicide was frustrated by Mrs. Unwin only just in time. In the December Clotworthy Rowley, a former fellow student of the law, renewed acquaintance by letter with him, and the Newtons paid a visit to Olney soon afterwards. Cowper's maternal relatives got into touch with him about this time, his first visitor being "Johnny" Johnson, his second cousin, who was then studying at Cambridge. Upon that youth's report of his visit, Mrs. Bodham, the poet's favourite cousin, sent to Cowper the only remaining portrait of his mother; this gift, as everyone knows, inspired one of his finest poems *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture out of Norfolk*.

LXVI.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, June 19, 1786.

My dear cousin's arrival has, as it could not fail to do, made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness in giving us her company is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live.

Olney will not be much longer the place of our habitation. At a village two miles distant we have hired a house of Mr. Throckmorton, a much better than we occupy at present, and yet not more expensive. It is situated very near to our most agreeable landlord, and his agreeable pleasure-grounds. In him, and in his wife, we shall find such companions as will always make the time pass pleasantly while they are in the country, and his grounds will afford us good air, and good walking-room in the winter; two advantages which we have not enjoyed at Olney, where I have no neighbour with whom I can converse, and where, seven months in the year, I have been imprisoned by dirty and impassable ways, till both my health and Mrs. Unwin's have suffered materially.

Homer is ever importunate, and will not suffer me to spend half the time with my distant friends that I would gladly give them.

W. C.

LXVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Olney, July 3, 1786.

After a long silence I begin again. A day given to my friends, is a day taken from Homer, but to such an interruption, now and then occurring, I have no objection. Lady Hesketh is, as you observe, arrived, and has been with us near a fortnight. She pleases every body, and is pleased in her turn with every thing she finds at Olney; is always cheerful and sweet-tempered, and knows no pleasure equal to that of communicating pleasure to us, and to all around her. This disposition in her is the more comfortable, because it is not the humour of the day, a sudden flash of benevolence and good spirits, occasioned merely by a change of scene; but it is her natural turn, and has governed all her conduct ever since I knew her first. We are consequently happy in her society, and shall be happier still to have you to partake with us in our joy. I can now assure you that her complexion is not at all indebted to art, having seen a hundred times the most convincing proof of its authenticity, her colour fading, and glowing again alternately as the weather, or her own temperature, has happened to affect it, while she has been sitting before me. I am fond of the sound of bells,¹ but was never

¹ How soft the music of those village bells
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet.

more pleased with those of Olney than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage (Lord Dartmouth excepted) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted with every thing that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for my years.

And now I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode, you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother dwelt in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purpose of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand. The bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to contain us, and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will I hope prove advantageous both to your mother and me in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially

by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all which my kind cousin will provide, and fit up a parlour and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven.

I have hardly left myself room for an answer to your queries concerning my friend John,¹ and his studies. What the supplement of Hirtius is made of, I know not. We did not read it at Westminster. I should imagine it might be dispensed with. I should recommend the civil war of Cæsar, because he wrote it who ranks I believe as the best writer, as well as soldier, of his day. There are books (I know not what they are, but you do, and can easily find them) that will inform him clearly of both the civil and military management of the Romans, the several officers, I mean, in both departments; and what was the peculiar province of each. The study of some such book would I should think prove a good introduction to that of Livy, unless you have a Livy with notes to that effect. A want of intelligence in those points has heretofore made the Roman history very dark and difficult to me; therefore I thus advise.

Our love is with all your lovelies, both great and small.

Yours ever,

W. C.

LXVIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 1786.

I am glad that I am obliged to apologise for an interval of three weeks that have elapsed since the receipt of yours; but not having it in my power to write oftener than I do, I am glad that my reason is such a one as you admit. In truth, my time is very much occupied; and the more because I not only have a long and laborious work in hand, for such it would prove at any rate, but because I make it a point to bestow my utmost attention upon it, and to give it all the finishing that the most scrupulous accuracy can command. As soon as breakfast is over, I retire to my nutshell of a summer-house, which is my verse-manufactory, and here I abide seldom less than three hours, and not often more. In the afternoon I return to it again; and all the day-light that follows, except what is devoted to a walk, is given to Homer. It is well for me, that a course which is now

¹ Uuwin's son.

become necessary is so much my choice. The regularity of it, indeed, has been in the course of this last week a little interrupted by the arrival of my dear cousin Lady Hesketh; but with the new week I shall, as they say, turn over a new leaf, and put myself under the same rigorous discipline as before. Something, and not a little, is due to the feelings that the sight of the kindest relation that ever man was blessed with must needs give birth to after so long a separation. But she, whose anxiety for my success is, I believe, greater than my own, will take care that I shall not play truant and neglect my proper business. It was an observation of a sensible man, whom I knew well in ancient days, (I mean when I was very young,) that people are never in reality happy when they boast much of being so. I feel myself accordingly well content to say, without any enlargement on the subject, that an inquirer after happiness might travel far, and not find a happier trio, than meet every day, either in our parlour, or in the parlour at the vicarage. I will not say that mine is not occasionally somewhat dashed with the sable hue of those notions, concerning myself and my situation, that have occupied, or rather possessed me so long: but on the other hand, I can also affirm, that my cousin's affectionate behaviour to us both, the sweetness of her temper, and the sprightliness of her conversation, relieve me in no small degree from the presence of them. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

LXIX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

August 24, 1786.

I catch a minute by the tail and hold it fast, while I write to you. The moment it is fled I must go to breakfast. . . .

I am still occupied in refining and polishing, and shall this morning give the finishing hand to the seventh book. Fuseli does me the honour to say that the most difficult, and most interesting parts of the poem, are admirably rendered. But because he did not express himself equally pleased with the more pedestrian parts of it, my labour therefore has been principally given to the dignification of them; not but that I have retouched considerably, and made better still, the best. In short I hope to make it all of a piece, and shall exert myself to the utmost to secure that desirable point. A storyteller, so very circumstantial as Homer, must of necessity present us often with much matter in itself capable of no other embellishment than purity

of diction and harmony of versification can give to it. *Hic labor, hoc opus est.* For our language, unless it be very severely chastised, has not the terseness, nor our measure the music of the Greek. But I shall not fail through want of industry.

We are likely to be very happy in our connexion with the Throckmortons. His reserve and mine wear off, and he talks with great pleasure of the comfort that he proposes to himself from our winter-evening conversations. His purpose seems to be, that we should spend them alternately with each other. Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs. Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office.

I will subjoin the measure of my hat.¹ Let the new one be furnished *à la mode*.

Believe me,
My dear William, truly yours,
W. C.

Mr. Throckmorton will, I doubt not, procure Lord Petre's name, if he can, without any hint from me. He could not interest himself more in my success than he seems to do. Could he get the Pope to subscribe, I should have him; and should be glad of him and the whole conclave.

The outside circumference of the hat crown is two feet one inch and an eighth.

LXX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston Underwood, Nov. 17, 1786.

My usual time of answering your letters having been unavoidably engrossed by occasions that would not be thrust aside, I have been obliged to postpone the payment of my debt for a whole week. Even now it is not without some difficulty that I discharge it; which you will easily believe, when I tell you that this is only the second day that has seen us inhabitants of our new abode.² When God speaks to a chaos, it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when His creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however

¹ Unwin had promised to purchase a new one for Cowper.

² Cowper had removed to Weston Underwood on the 15th.

convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonised. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, in the evening, Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of His absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one; for much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled; and yet, upon the whole, is exceeded. We are the tenants; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be; but better accommodated you may and will be.

I have not proceeded thus far without many interruptions, and though my paper is small, shall be obliged to make my letter still smaller. Our own removal is I believe the only news of Olney. Concerning this you will hear much, and much I doubt not that will have no truth in it. It is already reported there, and has been indeed for some time, that I am turned Papist.¹ You will know

¹ See Letter No. CLXXI.

how to treat a lie like this which proves nothing but the malignity of its author; but other tales you may possibly hear that will not so readily refute themselves. This, however, I trust you will always find true, that neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself shall have so conducted ourselves in our new neighbourhood, as that you shall have any occasion to be grieved on our account.

Mr. Unwin has been ill of a fever at Winchester, but by a letter from Mr. Thornton we learn that he is recovering, and hopes soon to travel. His Mrs. Unwin has joined him at that place.

Adieu, my dear friend. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrance and mine conclude me ever yours,

W. C.

LXXI.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec 4, 1786.

I sent you, my dear, a melancholy letter,¹ and I do not know that I shall now send you one very unlike it. Not that anything occurs in consequence of our late loss more afflictive than was to be expected, but the mind does not perfectly recover its tone after a shock like that which has been felt so lately. This I observe, that though my experience has long since taught me, that this world is a world of shadows, and that it is the more prudent, as well as the more Christian course to possess the comforts that we find in it, as if we possessed them not, it is no easy matter to reduce this doctrine into practice. We forget that that God who gave them, may, when He pleases, take them away; and that perhaps it may please Him to take them at a time when we least expect, or are least disposed to part from them. Thus it has happened in the present case. There never was a moment in Unwin's life, when there seemed to be more urgent want of him than the moment in which he died. He had attained to an age when, if they are at any time useful, men become useful to their families, their friends, and the world. His parish began to feel, and to be sensible of the advantages of his ministry. The clergy around him were many of them awed by his example. His children were thriving under his own tuition and management, and his eldest boy² is likely to feel his loss severely, being by his years in some respect qualified to understand the value of such a parent; by his literary proficiency too clever for a schoolboy, and too young at the same time for the university.

¹ His first announcement of Unwin's death, which took place at Winchester.

² John.

The removal of a man in the prime of life of such a character, and with such connexions, seems to make a void in society that can never be filled. God seemed to have made him just what he was, that he might be a blessing to others, and when the influence of his character and abilities began to be felt, removed him. These are mysteries, my dear, that we cannot contemplate without astonishment, but which will nevertheless be explained hereafter, and must in the mean time be revered in silence. It is well for his mother, that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence, else I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne. She derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought that he lived the life, and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Alban's, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more.

W. C.

LXXII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 11, 1786.

Shenstone, my dearest cousin, in his commentary on the vulgar adage which says, Second thoughts are best, observes that the *third* thought generally resolves itself into the *first*. Thus it has happened to me. My first thought was to effect a transposition of the old glasses into the new frame; my second, that perhaps both the old glasses and the new frame might be broken in the experiment; and my third, nevertheless, to make the trial. Accordingly I walked down to Olney this day, referred the matter to the watchmaker's consideration, and he has succeeded in the attempt to a wonder. I am at this moment peering through the same medium as usual, but with the advantage of a more ornamental mounting. I conjecture, by the way, from a passage in your note that accompanied the parcel, that I am indebted not *only* to you for this new accession to my elegant accommodations, but to some kind Incognito likewise; I beg that you will present my thanks accordingly. The clerk of the parish has made me a new pair of straps to my buckles; and the gingerbread, by its genial warmth, has delivered me since dinner from a distension of stomach that was immoderately

troublesome, so that I am the better for you, my dear, from head to foot. Long time I in vain endeavoured to make myself master of the lamp, and was obliged at last to call in William to my assistance. Now there are certain things which great geniuses miss, and which men born without any understanding at all hit immediately. In justification of the truth of this remark, William, who is a lump of dough, who never can be more dead than he is till he has been buried a month, explained it to *me* in a moment; accordingly we have used it twice, to my great satisfaction.

I sent Fuseli¹ a hare by the coach that went up this morning, and certainly no man could better deserve it, though it was one of the largest that ever was seen. I could not resist the impulse that I felt to acknowledge my obligations to his critical exertions; and yet shall be sorry that I complied with it, if in consequence of my civility he should become at all less rigorous in his demands or less severe in his animadversions. I am on the point of finishing the correction of the ninth book, which I have now adjusted to two sheets filled with his strictures. He observes at the close of them, that to execute a translation of this book in particular, with felicity, appears to him a prodigious task. He considers it, and I think justly, as one of the most consummate efforts of genius handed down to us from antiquity, and calls upon me for my utmost exertions. I have not failed to make them, with what success will be seen hereafter; but of this I am sure, that I have much improved it. The good-natured Padre of the Hall has offered me, in Mrs. Throckmorton's absence, his transcribing assistance, of which I shall avail myself, and deliver over to him the book in question in a day or two.

Mr. Chester paid me a morning visit about the middle of last week. He was, though a man naturally reserved, chatty and good humoured on the occasion, and when he took leave begged that I would not put myself to inconvenience for the sake of returning his visit with a punctilious alacrity in this wet and dirty season:—an allowance for which I was obliged to him, for since we now live five miles asunder, and I never ride, it does not at present occur to me by what means I could possibly get at him.

Our old house is not yet tenanted, but there are candidates for it. They are two who would divide the building between them—a shoemaker, and the alemonger at the Horse and Groom. The carpenter in the mean time has assured Mr. Smith, the landlord, that unless it be well propped, and speedily, it will

¹ The conscientious critic of Cowper's translation of Homer.

infallibly fall. Thank you, my dear, for saving our poor noddles from such imminent danger. . . .

The cloud that I mentioned to you, my cousin, has passed away, or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinders at John Gilpin little dream what the author sometimes suffers.—How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it!

May God bless thee, my dear! adieu.

Ever yours,

W. C.

Soon after this reaches you, we hope that you will receive a turkey. It was Mrs. Throckmorton's legacy to us when she went. It never had the honour to be crammed, for she crams none, but perhaps may not be the worse in flavour on that account. She fed it daily with her own hand.

LXXIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1786.

You must by no means, my dearest coz, pursue the plan that has suggested itself to you on the supposed loss of your letter. In the first place I choose that my Sundays, like the Sundays of other people, shall be distinguished by something that shall make me look forward to them with agreeable expectation, and for that reason desire that they may always bring me a letter from you. In the next place, if I know when to *expect* a letter, I know likewise when to *inquire after* a letter, if it happens not to come; a circumstance of some importance, considering how excessively careless they are at the Swan, where letters are sometimes overlooked, and do not arrive at their destination, if no inquiry be made, till some days have passed after their arrival at Olney. It has happened frequently to me to receive a letter long after all the rest have been delivered, and the Padre assured me that Mr. Throckmorton has sent notes three several times to Mrs. Marriot, complaining of this neglect. For these reasons, my dear, thou must write still on Saturdays, and as often on other days as thou pleasest.

The screens came safe, and one of them is at this moment interposed between me and the fire, much to the comfort of my peepers. The other of them being fitted up with a screw that was useless, I have consigned to proper hands, that it may be

made as serviceable as its brother. They are very neat, and I account them a great acquisition. Our carpenter assures me that the lameness of the chairs was not owing to any injury received in their journey, but that the maker never properly finished them. They were not high when they came, and in order to reduce them to a level, we have lowered them an inch. Thou knowest, child, that the short foot could not be lengthened, for which reason we shortened the long ones. The box containing the plate and the brooms reached us yesterday, and nothing had suffered the least damage by the way. Every thing is smart, every thing is elegant, and we admire them all. The short candlesticks are short enough. I am now writing with those upon the table; Mrs. U. is reading opposite, and they suit us both exactly. With the money that you have in hand, you may purchase, my dear, at your most convenient time, a tea-urn; that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself. We want likewise a tea-waiter, meaning, if you please, such a one as you may remember to have seen at the Hall, a wooden one. To which you may add, from the same fund, three or four yards of yard-wide muslin, wherewithal to make neckcloths for my worship. If after all these disbursements any thing should be left in the bottom of the purse, we shall be obliged to you if you will expend it in the purchase of silk pocket-handkerchiefs. There, my precious—I think I have charged thee with commissions in plenty.

You neither must nor shall deny us the pleasure of sending to you such small matters as we do. As to the partridges, you may recollect, when I remind you of it, that I never eat them; they refuse to pass my stomach; and Mrs. Unwin rejoiced in receiving them only because she could pack them away to you—therefore never lay us under any embargoes of this kind, for I tell you beforehand, that we are both incorrigible. My beloved cousin, the first thing I open my eyes upon in a morning, is it not the bed in which you have laid me? Did you not, in our old dismal parlour at Olney, give me the tea on which I breakfast?—the chocolate that I drink at noon, and the table at which I dine?—the everything, in short, that I possess in the shape of convenience, is it not all from you? and is it possible, think you, that we should either of us overlook an opportunity of making such a tiny acknowledgement of your kindness? Assure yourself that never, while my name is Giles Gingerbread, will I dishonour

my glorious ancestry, and my illustrious appellation, by so unworthy a conduct. I love you at my heart, and so does Mrs. U., and we must say thank you, and send you a peppercorn when we can. So thank you, my dear, for the brawn and the chine, and for all the good things that you announce, and at present, I will, for your sake, say no more of thanksgiving. . . .

The Padre is to dine with us on Thursday next. I am highly pleased with him, and intend to make all possible advances to a nearer acquaintance. Why he is so silent in company I know not. Perhaps he is reserved, like some other people: or perhaps he holds it unsuitable to his function to be forward in mixed conversation. Certain it is, that he has enough to say when he and I are together. He has transcribed the ninth book for me, and is now transcribing the twelfth, which Mrs. Throckmorton left unfinished. Poor Teedon¹ has dined with us once, and it did me good to stuff him. . . .

I am, my dearest,
Your most Gingerbread Giles, &c.,
WM. COWPER.

LXXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 18, 1787.

I have been so much indisposed with the fever that I told you had seized me, my nights during the whole week may be said to have been almost sleepless. The consequence has been, that except the translation of about thirty lines at the conclusion of the thirteenth book, I have been forced to abandon Homer entirely. This was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seem to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard therefore to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say, Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me

¹ The Olney schoolmaster. See p. 194.

all her time, and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world. . . .

My fever is not yet gone, but sometimes seems to leave me. It is altogether of the nervous kind, and attended, now and then, with much dejection.

A young gentleman called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left the university there. He came I suppose partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch professors for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it.

Adieu, very affectionately,

W. C.

LXXV.

TO LADY HESKETH

Dec 19, 1787 (in Postmark).

Saturday, my dearest cousin, was a day of receipts. In the morning I received a box filled with an abundant variety of stationery-ware, containing, in particular, a quantity of paper sufficient, well covered with good writing, to immortalise any man. I have nothing to do, therefore, but to cover it as aforesaid, and my name will never die. In the evening I received a smaller box, but still more welcome on account of its contents. It contained an almanack in red morocco, a pencil of a new invention, called an everlasting pencil, and a noble purse, with a noble gift in it, called a Bank note for twenty-five pounds. I need use no arguments to assure you, my cousin, that by the help of ditto note, we shall be able to fadge very comfortably till Christmas is turned, without having the least occasion to draw upon you. By the post yesterday—that is, Sunday morning—I received also a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularised; in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, the *Drop of Ink*. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and *Anonymous* there may be some communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it.

My toothache is in a great measure, that is to say, almost entirely removed; not by snipping my ears, as poor Lady

Strange's ears were snipped, nor by any other chirurgical operation, except such as I could perform myself. The manner of it was as follows: we dined last Thursday at the Hall; I sat down to table, trembling lest the tooth, of which I told you in my last, should not only refuse its own office, but hinder all the rest. Accordingly, in less than five minutes, by a hideous dislocation of it, I found myself not only in great pain, but under an absolute prohibition not only to eat, but to speak another word. Great emergencies sometimes meet the most effectual remedies. I resolved, if it were possible, then and there to draw it. This I effected so dexterously by a sudden twitch, and afterwards so dexterously conveyed it into my pocket, that no creature present, not even Mrs. Unwin, who sat facing me, was sensible either of my distress, or of the manner of my deliverance from it. I am poorer by one tooth than I was, but richer by the unimpeded use of all the rest.

When I lived in the Temple, I was rather intimate with a son of the late Admiral Rowley and a younger brother of the present Admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him, in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books, which I had lent him five and twenty years ago, and which he apologised for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake; for at Dublin, it seems, he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revive, and wrote accordingly. I have now, therefore, a correspondent in Ireland, another in Scotland, and a third in Wales. All this would be very diverting, had I little more time to spare to them.

My dog, my dear, is a spaniel.¹ Till Miss Gunning begged him, he was the property of a farmer, and while he was their property had been accustomed to lie in the chimney-corner, among the embers, till the hair was singed from his back, and till nothing was left of his tail but the gristle. Allowing for these disadvantages, he is really handsome; and when Nature shall have furnished him with a new coat, a gift which, in consideration of the ragged condition of his old one, it is hoped she will not long delay, he will then be unrivalled in personal endowments by any dog in this country. He and my cat are excessively fond of each other, and play a thousand gambols together that it is impossible not to admire.

Know thou, that from this time forth, the post comes daily to Weston. This improvement is effected by an annual subscrip-

¹ See later references to this dog called Beau.

tion of ten shillings. The Throcks invited us to the measure, and we have acceded to it. Their servant will manage this concern for us at the Olney post-office, and the subscription is to pay a man for stumping three times a week from Olney to Newport Pagnell, and back again.

Returning from my walk to-day, while I was passing by some small closes at the back of the town, I heard the voices of some persons extremely merry at the top of the hill. Advancing into the large field behind our house, I there met Mr. Throck, wife, and brother George. Combine in your imagination as large proportions as you can of earth and water intermingled so as to constitute what is commonly called mud, and you will have but an imperfect conception of the quantity that had attached itself to her petticoats: but she had half-boots, and laughed at her own figure. She told me that she had this morning transcribed sixteen pages of my Homer. I observed in reply, that to write so much, and to gather all that dirt, was no bad morning's work, considering the shortness of the days at this season.

Yours, my dear,

W. C.

LXXVI.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, Dec 24, 1787.

The Throcks do not leave Weston till after Easter. But this I hope will have no effect upon your movements, should an opportunity present itself to you of coming sooner. We dined there last Saturday. After dinner, while we all sat round the fire, I told them, as I related it to you, the adventure of my tooth. This drew from Mrs. Throck (singular as it must appear), a tale the very counterpart of mine. She, in like manner, had a tooth to draw, while I was drawing mine; and thus it came to pass (the world, I suppose, could not furnish such another instance) that we two, without the least intimation to each other of our respective distress, were employed in the same moment, sitting side by side, in drawing each a tooth: an operation which we performed with equal address, and without being perceived by any one.

This morning had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever arisen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock; at eight she came to me, and showed me her bed-gown with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the candle upon

the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her that, if it continued there, it might possibly set fire to her clothes, therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at that very time. She found herself uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes; supposing that some of the billets might lie too forward, she disposed them differently; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more troublesome, (for by this time the room was filled with it,) she cast her eye downward, and perceived not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which must probably have ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated—that, secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take care of thyself, gentle Yahoo! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee. . . .

Ever thine, most truly,

WM. COWPER.

LXXVII.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Sept. 25, 1788.

Say what is the thing by my riddle design'd
Which you carried to London, and yet left behind?

I expect your answer, and without a fee. The half-hour next before breakfast I devote to you. The moment Mrs. Unwin arrives in the study, by what I have written much or little, I shall make my bow, and take leave. If you live to be a judge, as if I augur right you will, I shall expect to hear of a walking circuit.

I was shocked at what you tell me of —. Superior talents, it seems, give no security for propriety of conduct; on the contrary, having a natural tendency to nourish pride, they often betray the possessor into such mistakes as men more moderately gifted never commit. Ability, therefore, is not wisdom, and an ounce of grace is a better guard against gross absurdity than the brightest talents in the world.

I rejoice that you are prepared for transcript work; here will

be plenty for you. The day on which you shall receive this, I beg you will remember to drink one glass at least to the success of the Iliad, which I finished the day before yesterday, and yesterday began the Odyssey. It will be some time before I shall perceive myself travelling in another road; the objects around me are at present so much the same; Olympus and a council of gods meet me at my first entrance. To tell you the truth, I am weary of heroes and deities, and, with reverence be it spoken, shall be glad, for variety's sake, to exchange their company for that of a Cyclops.

Weston has not been without its tragedies since you left us; Mrs. Throckmorton's piping bullfinch has been eaten by a rat, and the villain left nothing but poor Bully's beak behind him. It will be a wonder if this event does not at some convenient time employ my versifying passion.¹ Did ever fair lady, from the Lesbia of Catullus to the present day, lose her bird and find no poet to commemorate the loss?

W. C.

LXXVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, Jan. 31, 1789.

I have dined thrice at the Hall since we lost you, and this morning accompanied Mrs. Frog in her chaise to Chicheley. What vagary I shall perform next is at present uncertain, but such violent doings must have proportionable consequences. Mrs. Unwin certainly recovers,² but not fast enough to satisfy me. She now moves from chamber to chamber without help of wheels, but not without help of a staff on one side, and a human prop on the other. In another week I hope she will be able to descend the staircase, but it will probably be long ere she will move unsupported. Yesterday an old man came hither on foot from Kimbolton; he brought a basket addressed to me from my yet unseen friend Mrs. King³; it contained two pair of bottle-stands, her own manufacture; a knitting-bag, and a piece of plum-cake. The time seems approaching when that good lady and we are to be better acquainted; and all these *douceurs* announce it.

I have lately had a letter to write daily, and sometimes more than one: this is one reason why I have not sooner answered

¹ See Cowper's poem on the "tragedy."

² From a fall on the gravel walk covered with ice. Her hip was badly bruised.

³ See p. 203.

your last. You will not forget that you allowed me a latitude in that respect, and I begin already to give you proof how much I am persuaded of the sincerity with which you did it. In truth, I am the busiest man that ever lived sequestered as I do, and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity. . . .

It would be an easy matter to kill me, by putting me into a chaise and commanding me to talk as I go. It is astonishing how exhausted I feel myself after rumbling and chattering incessantly for three hours.

Mrs. Frog,¹ of Bath, is better, and George continues at the Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Gifford are expected there next Tuesday. Bully is in perfect health, and if I can secure him from such a fate, shall never be cat's-meat. Take care of thyself for my sake, that I may see thee yet again in due season. It is very kind in Mr. Rose to distinguish so honourably a poor poet like me, and it shall be my endeavour to merit by my future good behaviour as a bard the favour which he shows me now. Your kind expression on the same subject I will never forget; but I had a thousand times rather be as poor as all poets are, than you should ungown yourself to prevent it. . . .

Farewell, my dearest coz. With Mrs. Unwin's affectionate respects, I am ever thine,

WM. C.

LXXIX.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb 26, 1790.

You have set my heart at ease, my cousin, so far as you were yourself the object of its anxieties. What other troubles it feels can be cured by God alone. But you are never silent a week longer than usual, without giving an opportunity to my imagination, (ever fruitful in flowers of a sable hue,) to tease me with them day and night. London² is indeed a pestilent place, as you call it, and I would, with all my heart, that thou hadst less to do with it; were you under the same roof with me, I should

¹ Mrs. Throckmorton; Cowper's pet name for the family.

² Ever after his removal to the country Cowper had a horror of London. See *The Task*.

"The fairest capital of all the world,
By riot and incontinence the worst"—

and

I 698-9;

"Chequered with all complexions of mankind,
And spotted with all crimes."

III 836-7.

know you to be safe, and should never distress you with melancholy letters.

I feel myself well enough inclined to the measure you propose, and will show to your new acquaintance with all my heart a sample of my translation, but it shall not, if you please, be taken from the *Odyssey*. It is a poem of a gentler character than the *Iliad*, and as I propose to carry her by a *coup de main*, I shall employ Achilles, Agamemnon, and the two armies of Greece and Troy in my service. I will accordingly send you in the box that I received from you last night the two first books of the *Iliad*, for that lady's perusal; to those I have given a third revisal; for them therefore I will be answerable, and am not afraid to stake the credit of my work upon *them* with her, or with any living wight, especially one who understands the original. I do not mean that even they are finished, for I shall examine and cross-examine them yet again, and so you may tell her, but I know that they will not disgrace me; whereas it is so long since I have looked at the *Odyssey*, that I know nothing at all about it. They shall set sail from Olney on Monday morning in the *Diligence*, and will reach you I hope in the evening. As soon as she has done with them, I shall be glad to have them again, for the time draws near when I shall want to give them the last touch.

I am delighted with Mrs. Bodham's kindness, in giving me the only picture of my own mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it than the richest jewel in the British crown, for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated.¹ I remember her too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable. Every body loved her, and with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, every body was sure to do so.

I have a very affectionate and a very clever letter from Johnson, who promises me the transcript of the books entrusted to him in a few days. I have a great love for that young man; he has some drops of the same stream in his veins that once animated the original of that dear picture.

W. C.

¹ How gladly would the man recall to life
The boy's neglected sire! a mother too,
That softer friend.

LXXX.

TO MRS. BODHAM

MY DEAREST ROSE,

Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.

Whom I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her: I love you, therefore, and love you much, for her sake, and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning.¹ She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression.² There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability; and a little, I would hope, both of his and of her——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I

¹ And, while the wings of fancy still are free
And I can view this mimic show of thee,
Time has but half succeeded in his theft,—
Thyself removed, thy power to soothe me left.

² But the record fair,
That memory keeps of all thy kindness there,
Still outlives many a storm, that has effaced
A thousand other themes less deeply traced.

Lines from the poem

think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge; and that breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together, for want of house-room; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson,¹ or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so! Neither do I at all forget my Cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am,

My dear, dear Rose, ever yours,

W. C.

P.S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P.S.—I find on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

¹ Names of his various Norfolk relatives.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

LXXXI.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

MY DEAR COUSIN JOHN,

Weston, Feb. 28, 1790.

I have much wished to hear from you, and though you are welcome to write to Mrs. Unwin as often as you please, I wish myself to be numbered among your correspondents.

I shall find time to answer you, doubt it not! Be as busy as we may, we can always find time to do what is agreeable to us. By the way, had you a letter from Mrs. Unwin? I am witness that she addressed one to you before you went into Norfolk; but your mathematico-poetical head forgot to acknowledge the receipt of it.

I was never more pleased in my life than to learn, and to learn from herself, that my dearest Rose¹ is still alive. Had she not engaged me to love her by the sweetness of her character when a child, she would have done it effectually now, by making me the most acceptable present in the world, my own dear mother's picture. I am perhaps the only person living who remembers her; but I remember her well, and can attest on my own knowledge, the truth of the resemblance. Amiable and elegant as the countenance is, such exactly was her own; she was one of the tenderest parents, and so just a copy of her is therefore to me invaluable.

I wrote yesterday to my Rose. to tell her all this, and to thank her for her kindness in sending it. Neither do I forget your kindness, who intimated to her that I should be happy to possess it.

She invites me into Norfolk; but alas, she might as well invite the house in which I dwell; for all other considerations and impediments apart, how is it possible that a translator of Homer should lumber to such a distance? But though I cannot comply with her kind invitation, I have made myself the best amends in my power by inviting her, and all the family of Donnes, to Weston. Perhaps we could not accommodate them all at once, but in succession we could; and can at any time find room for five, three of them being females, and one a married one. You are a mathematician; tell me then how five persons can be lodged

¹ Mrs. Anne Bodham.

in three beds, (two males and three females,) and I shall have good hope, that you will proceed a senior optime? It would make me happy to see our house so furnished. As to yourself, whom I know to be a *subscalarian*, or a man that sleeps under the stairs, I should have no objection at all, neither could you possibly have any yourself to the garret, as a place in which you might be disposed of with great felicity of accommodation.

I thank you much for your services in the transcribing way, and would by no means have you despair of an opportunity to serve me in the same way yet again. Write me to soon, and tell me when I shall see you.

I have not said the half that I have to say, but breakfast is at hand, which always terminates my epistles.

What have you done with your poem? The trimming that it procured you here has not, I hope, put you out of conceit with it entirely; you are more than equal to the alteration that it needs. Only remember, that in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle: the want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it. So now adieu for the present. Beware of killing yourself with problems; for if you do, you will never live to be another Sir Isaac.

Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrance attend you; Lady Hesketh is much disposed to love you; perhaps most who know you have some little tendency the same way.

LXXXII.

TO MRS. BODHAM

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Weston, Sept. 9, 1790.

I am truly sorry to be forced after all to resign the hope of seeing you and Mr. Bodham at Weston this year; the next may possibly be more propitious, and I heartily wish it may. Poor Catharine's¹ unseasonable indisposition has also cost us a disappointment, which we much regret; and were it not that Johnny has made shift to reach us, we should think ourselves completely unfortunate. But him we have, and him we will hold as long as we can, so expect not very soon to see him in Norfolk. He is so harmless, cheerful, gentle, and good-tempered, and I am so entirely at my ease with him, that I cannot surrender him without a *needs must*, even to those who have a superior claim upon him. He left us yesterday morning, and whither

¹ Mrs Bodham's sister and Johnny's mother.

do you think he is gone, and on what errand? Gone, as sure as you are alive, to London, and to convey my Homer to the book-seller's. But he will return the day after to-morrow, and I mean to part with him no more, till necessity shall force us asunder. Suspect me not, my cousin, of being such a monster as to have imposed this task myself on your kind nephew, or even to have thought of doing it. It happened that one day, as we chatted by the fireside, I expressed a wish that I could hear of some trusty body going to London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years. For I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first, to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone therefore with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less.

W. C.

LXXXIII.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,

April 1, 1791

A word or two before breakfast; which is all that I shall have time to send you.—You have not, I hope, forgot to tell Mr. Frog, how much I am obliged to him for his kind though unsuccessful attempt in my favour at Oxford. It seems not a little extraordinary, that persons so nobly patronised themselves on the score of literature, should resolve to give no encouragement to it in return.¹ Should I find a fair opportunity to thank them hereafter, I will not neglect it.

Could Homer come himself, distress'd and poor,
And tune his harp at Rhedycina's door,
The rich old vixen would exclaim (I fear),
"Begone! no trumper gets a farthing here."

I have read your husband's pamphlet through and through. You may think perhaps, and so may he, that a question so remote from all concern of mine could not interest me; but if you think so, you are both mistaken. He can write nothing that will not

¹ Their reply was, "They subscribe to nothing."

interest me; in the first place, for the writer's sake; and in the next place, because he writes better and reasons better than any body,—with more candour, and with more sufficiency, and consequently with more satisfaction to all his readers, save only his opponents. They, I think, by this time wish that they had let him alone.

Tom is delighted past measure with his wooden nag, and gallops at a rate that would kill any horse that had a life to lose.

Adieu!

W. C.

LXXXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, May 27, 1791.

I who am neither dead, nor sick, nor idle, should have no excuse, were I as tardy in answering, as you in writing. I live indeed where leisure abounds; and you, where leisure is not: a difference that accounts sufficiently both for your silence and my loquacity.

When you told Mrs. ———, that my Homer would come forth in May, you told her what you believed, and therefore no falsehood. But you told her at the same time what will not happen, and therefore not a truth. There is a medium between truth and falsehood; and (I believe) the word mistake expresses it exactly. I will therefore say that you were mistaken. If instead of May you had mentioned June, I flatter myself that you would have hit the mark. For in June there is every probability that we shall publish. You will say, "hang the printer!—for it is his fault." But stay, my dear, hang him not just now! For to execute him, and find another, will cost us time, and so much too that I question if, in that case, we should publish sooner than in August. To say truth, I am not perfectly sure that there will be any necessity to hang him at all; though that is a matter which I desire to leave entirely at your discretion, alleging only in the mean time, that the man does not appear to me during the last half-year to have been at all in fault. His remittance of sheets in all that time has been punctual, save and except while the Easter holidays lasted, when (I suppose) he found it impossible to keep his devils to their business. I shall however receive the last sheet of the Odyssey to-morrow, and have already sent up the Preface, together with all the needful. You see therefore that the publication of this famous work cannot be delayed much longer.

As for politics, I reckon not, having no room in my head for anything but the Slave-bill.¹ That is lost; and all the rest is a trifle. I have not seen Paine's book,² but refused to see it when it was offered to me. No man shall convince me that I am improperly governed, while I feel the contrary.

Adieu!

W. C.

LXXXV.

TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston, June 13, 1791.

I ought to have thanked you for your agreeable and entertaining letter much sooner, but I have many correspondents, who will not be said nay; and have been obliged of late to give my last attentions to Homer. The very last indeed; for yesterday I dispatched to town, after revising them carefully, the proof-sheets of subscribers' names, among which I took special notice of yours, and am much obliged to you for it. We have contrived, or rather my bookseller and printer have contrived (for they have never waited a moment for me,) to publish as critically at the wrong time, as if my whole interest and success had depended upon it. March, April, and May, said Johnson to me in a letter that I received from him in February, are the best months for publication. *Therefore* now it is determined that Homer shall come out on the 1st of July; that is to say, exactly at the moment when, except a few lawyers, not a creature will be left in town who will ever care one farthing about him. To which of these two friends of mine I am indebted for this management, I know not. It does not please; but I would be a philosopher as well as a poet, and therefore make no complaint, or grumble at all about it. You, I presume, have had dealings with them both;—how did they manage for you? And if as they have for me, how did you behave under it? Some who love me complain that I am too passive; and I should be glad of an opportunity to justify myself by your example. The fact is, should I thunder ever so loud, no efforts of that sort will avail me now; therefore like a good economist of my bolts, I choose to reserve them for more profitable occasions. . . .

With my love to your fair sisters, I remain,

Dear Sir, most truly yours,

W. C.

¹ An unsuccessful attempt to abolish the slave trade Willerforce renewed the struggle in 1804.

² Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*.

LXXXVI.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 23, 1791.

Send me a draft, my dearest coz, for as much money as I hope thou hast by this time received on my account, viz. from Anonymous, and viz. from Wm. Cowper, for we are driven to our last guinea. Let me have it by Sunday's post, lest we become absolutely insolvent.

We have received beef, tongues and tea,
And certainly from none but thee;
Therefore with all our power of songs,
Thanks for beef, and tea, and tongues!

As I said, so it proves. I told you that I should like our guests when they had been here a day or two, and accordingly I like them so well now that it is impossible to like them better. Mrs. Balls¹ is an unaffected, plain-dressing, good-tempered, cheerful motherly sort of a body, and has the affection of a parent for her niece and nephew. Her niece is an amiable young woman in all respects, a handsome likeness of Johnny, and with a smile so like my mother's, that in this cousin of mine she seems almost restored to me again. I would that she had better health, but she has suffered sadly in her constitution by divers causes, and especially by nursing her father in his last illness, from whose side she stirred not till he expired. Johnny, with whom I have been always delighted, is also so much in love with me that no place in the world will suit him to live in at present, except Weston. Where he lives his sister will live likewise, and their aunt is under promise to live with them, at least till Catharine shall have attained under her tuition some competent share of skill in the art of housekeeping. They have looked at a house, the next but one to ours, and like it. You may perhaps remember it - it is an old house with *girt* casement windows, and has a fir tree in the little court in front of it. Here they purpose to settle, if Aunt Bodham, who is most affectionately attached to them all, can be persuaded not to break her heart about it. Of this there are some hopes, because, did they live in Norfolk, they would neither live with her, nor even in her neighbourhood, but at thirty miles distance. Johnny is writing to her now with a view to reconcile her to the measure, and should he succeed, the house will be hired immediately. It will please thee, I think, to know that we are likely to have our solitary situation a little enlivened, and therefore I have given thee this detail of the matter. . . .

¹ Harriet, sister to Mrs. Bodham.

With affectionate compliments from our guests, and with Mrs. Unwin's kindest remembrances, I remain, dearest coz,

Ever Thine,

WM. COWPER.

LXXXVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, July 11, 1791.

Your draft is safe in our possession, and will soon be out of it, that is to say, will soon be negotiated. Many thanks for that, and still more for your kindness in bidding me draw yet again, should I have occasion. None I hope will offer. I have a purse at Johnson's, to which, if need should arise, I can recur at pleasure. The present is rather an expensive time with us, and will probably cause the consumption of some part of my loose cash in the hands of my bookseller.

I am not much better pleased with that dealer in authors than yourself. His first proposal, which was to pay me with my own money, or in other words to get my copy for nothing, not only dissatisfied but hurt me, implying, as I thought, the meanest opinion possible of my labours. For that for which an intelligent man will give nothing, can be worth nothing. The consequence was that my spirits sank considerably below par, and have but just begun to recover themselves. His second offer, which is, to pay all expenses, and to give me a thousand pounds next midsummer, leaving the copyright still in my hands, is more liberal. With this offer I have closed, and Mr. Rose will to-morrow clench the bargain. Josephus¹ understands that Johnson will gain two hundred pounds by it, but I apprehend that he is mistaken, and that Mr. Rose is right, who estimates his gains at one. Mr. Hill's mistake, if he be mistaken, arises from his rating the expenses of the press at only five hundred pounds, whereas Johnson rates them at six. Be that as it may, I am contented. If he gains two, I shall not grudge, and if he gains but one, considering all things, I think he will gain enough.

As to Sephus' scheme of signing the seven hundred copies in order to prevent a clandestine multiplication of them, at the same time that I feel the wisdom of it, I feel also an unsurmountable dislike of it. It would be calling Johnson a knave, and telling the public that I think him one. Now, though I do not perhaps think so highly of his liberality as some people do,

¹ Josephus or Sephus, i.e. Joseph Hill, who was Cowper's financial adviser

and I once was myself disposed to think, yet I have no reason at present to charge him with dishonesty. I must even take my chance, as other poets do, and if I am wronged, must comfort myself with what somebody has said,—that authors are the natural prey of booksellers. . . .

We are all well except poor Catharine, who yesterday consulted Dr. Kerr, and to-day is sick of his prescription. Our affectionate hearts all lay themselves at your pettitees, and with Mrs. Unwin's best remembrances, I remain, for my own peculiar, most entirely thine,

WM. COWPER.

The Frogs are expected here on Wednesday.

8. MRS. UNWIN'S ILLNESS AND HAYLEY'S KINDNESS

(LETTERS LXXVIII.—CVII.)

Cowper's *Homer* being ready for the press, his publisher invited him to prepare an edition of Milton that was "to rival, and if possible, to exceed in splendour, Boydell's Shakespeare." Cowper accepted the offer, probably unaware that a fellow bard, William Hayley, had undertaken a similar commission for Boydell himself. As a result, the two poets became acquainted, and Hayley was invited to Weston in May 1792. He reached there to find Mrs. Unwin in a very poor state of health; she had had a paralytic stroke the previous December, and she was stricken again a few days after his arrival. When she had somewhat recovered, Cowper was persuaded by his new friend to accompany her on a visit to Earham—Hayley's "little Paradise," as Gibbon called it. Here Cowper's portrait was drawn by Romney—the second one that year, for Abbott had painted him a few months previously. But the two visitors soon wearied of Earham, and they returned home, having benefited but little by their six weeks' holiday. Mrs. Unwin's illness and Cowper's own dejection delayed his editorial work and impeded his revision and annotation of *Homer*: to this dark period belong the famous lines *To Mary*. Hayley paid two other visits to Cowper, on the first of which he proposed a joint poem entitled *The Four Ages*. Lady Hesketh, too, visited him, but was unable to do more than temporarily dispel the gloom. She wrote at length to his kinsman Johnson, who prevailed on the two invalids to visit him in Norfolk for a few months' residence by the sea.

LXXXVIII.

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,

Weston Underwood, Oct. 22, 1791.

How often am I to be mortified by hearing that you have been within sixty miles of me, and have taken your flight again to an immeasurable distance? Will you never in one of these excursions to England, (three of which at least you have made since we have had intercourse by letter,)—will you never find

your way to Weston? Consider that we are neither of us immortal, and that if we do not contrive to meet before we are fifty years older, our meeting in this world at least will be an affair altogether hopeless; for by that time your travelling days will be over, as mine have been these many years.

I often think of Carr, and shall always think of him with affection. Should I never see him more, I shall never, I trust, be capable of forgetting his indefatigable attention to me during the last year I spent in London. Two years after I invited him to Huntingdon, where I lived at that time, but he pleaded some engagement, and I have neither seen him nor heard of him, except from yourself, from that hour to the present. I know by experience with what reluctance we move when we have been long fixed; but could he prevail on himself to move hither he would make me very happy; and when you write to him next you may tell him so.

I have to tell you in answer to your question, what I am doing,—that I am preparing to appear in a new character, not as an author, but as an editor;—editor of Milton's Poetical Works, which are about to be published in a more splendid style than ever yet. My part of the business is to translate the Latin and Italian pieces, to settle the text, to select notes from others, and to write notes of my own. At present the translation employs me; when that shall be finished, I must begin to read all the books that I can scrape together, of which either Milton or his works are the subject; and that done shall proceed to my commentary. Few people have studied Milton more, or are more familiar with his poetry, than myself; but I never looked into him yet with the eyes of an annotator: therefore whether I may expect much or little difficulty, I know no more than you do, but I shall be occupied in the business, no doubt, these two years. Fuseli is to be the painter, and will furnish thirty capital pictures to the engraver.

I have little poems in plenty, but nothing that I can send to Ireland, unless you could put me into a way of conveying them thither at free cost, for should you be obliged to pay for them, *le jeu ne vaudra pas les chandelles*.

I rejoice that your family are all well, and in every thing that conduces to your happiness. Adieu, my good, old, and valued friend; permit me to thank you once more for your kind services in the matter of my subscription,

And believe me most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

LXXXIX.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The Lodge, Dec. 21, 1791.

It grieves me, after having indulged a little hope that I might see you in the holidays, to be obliged to disappoint myself. The occasion too is such as will ensure me your sympathy.

On Saturday last, while I was at my desk near the window, and Mrs. Unwin at the fireside, opposite to it, I heard her suddenly exclaim, "Oh! Mr. Cowper, don't let me fall!" I turned and saw her actually falling, together with her chair, and started to her side just in time to prevent her. She was seized with a violent giddiness, which lasted, though with some abatement, the whole day, and was attended too with some other very alarming symptoms. At present however she is relieved from the vertigo, and seems in all respects better.

She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions.¹ She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them; which will probably be, at the best, a considerable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it. Another such a stroke upon her would, I think, upset me completely; but at present I hold up bravely.

W. C.

XC.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, March 25, 1792.

Mr. Rose's longer stay than he at first intended was the occasion of the longer delay of my answer to your note, as you may both have perceived by the date thereof, and learned from his information. It was a daily trouble to me to see it lying in the window-seat, while I knew you were in expectation of its arrival. By this time I presume you have seen him, and have seen likewise Mr. Hayley's friendly letter and complimentary sonnet, as well as the letter of the honest Quaker; all of which, at least the two former, I shall be glad to receive again at a fair opportunity. Mr. Hayley's letter slept six weeks in Johnson's custody. It was necessary I should answer it without delay, and accordingly I answered it the very evening on which I

¹ Compare the sonnet:

"Mary, I want a lyre with other strings,"

probably written a few months previously.

received it, giving him to understand, among other things, how much vexation the bookseller's folly had cost me, who had detained it so long; especially on account of the distress that I knew it must have occasioned to him also. From his reply, which the return of the post brought me, I learn that in the long interval of my non-correspondence he had suffered anxiety and mortification enough; so much that I dare say he made twenty vows to hazard again either letter or compliment to an unknown author. What indeed could he imagine less, than that I meant by such an obstinate silence to tell him that I valued neither him nor his praises, nor his proffered friendship; in short that I considered him as a rival, and therefore, like a true author, hated and despised him? He is now, however, convinced that I love him, as indeed I do, and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me. Brute should I be if I did not, for he promises me every assistance in his power. . .

W. C.

XCI.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, April 6, 1792.

God grant that this friendship of ours may be a comfort to us all the rest of our days, in a world where true friendships are rarities, and especially where suddenly formed they are apt soon to terminate! But, as I said before, I feel a disposition of heart toward you that I never felt for one whom I had never seen; and that shall prove itself, I trust, in the event a propitious omen.

* * * * *

Horace says somewhere, though I may quote it amiss perhaps, for I have a terrible memory,—

*Utrumque nostrum incredibili modo
Consentit astrum* ———

* * * * * Our *stars consent*, at least have had an influence somewhat similar in another and more important article.—* * *

It gives me the sincerest pleasure that I may hope to see you at Weston; for as to any migrations of mine, they must, I fear, notwithstanding the joy I should feel in being a guest of yours, be still considered in the light of impossibilities. Come then, my friend, and be as welcome, as the country people say here, as the flowers in May! I am happy, as I say, in the expecta-

tion; but the fear, or rather the consciousness, that I shall not answer on a nearer view, makes it a trembling kind of happiness, and a doubtful.

After the privacy which I have mentioned above, I went to Huntingdon; soon after my arrival there, I took up my quarters at the house of the Rev. Mr. Unwin; I lived with him while he lived, and ever since his death have lived with his widow. Her, therefore, you will find mistress of the house; and I judge of you amiss, or you will find her just such as you would wish. To me she has been often a nurse, and invariably the kindest friend through a thousand adversities that I have had to grapple with in the course of almost thirty years. I thought it better to introduce her to you thus, than to present her to you at your coming, quite a stranger.

Bring with you any books that you think may be useful to my commentatorship, for with you for an interpreter I shall be afraid of none of them. And in truth, if you think that you shall want them, you must bring books for your own use also, for they are an article with which I am *heinously unprovided*; being much in the condition of the man whose library Pope describes as

No mighty store,
His own works neatly bound, and little more!

You shall know how this has come to pass hereafter.

Tell me, my friend, are your letters in your own handwriting? If so, I am in pain for your eyes, lest by such frequent demands upon them I should hurt them. I had rather write you three letters for one, much as I prize your letters, than *that* should happen. And now for the present, adieu;—I am going to accompany Milton into the lake of fire and brimstone, having just begun my annotations.

W. C.

XCII.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, May 24, 1792.

I wish with all my heart, my dearest coz, that I had not ill news for the subject of the present letter. My friend, my Mary, has again been attacked by the same disorder that threatened me last year with the loss of her, and of which you were yourself a witness. Gregson would not allow that first stroke to be paralytic, but this he acknowledges to be so; and with respect to the former, I never had myself any doubt that it was; but this has been much the severest. Her speech has been almost

unintelligible from the moment that she was struck; it is with difficulty that she opens her eyes, and she cannot keep them open, the muscles necessary to the purpose being contracted; and as to self-moving powers, from place to place, and the use of her right hand and arm, she has entirely lost them.

It has happened well, that of all men living the man most qualified to assist and comfort me is here, though till within these few days I never saw him, and a few weeks since had no expectation that I ever should. You have already guessed that I mean Hayley, Hayley who loves me as if he had known me from my cradle. When he returns to town, as he must, alas! too soon, he will pay his respects to you.

I will not conclude without adding that our poor patient is beginning, I hope, to recover from this stroke also; but her amendment is slow, as must be expected at her time of life and in such a disorder. I am as well myself as you have ever known me in a time of much trouble, and even better.

It was not possible to prevail on Mrs. Unwin to let me send for Dr. Kerr, but Hayley has written to his friend Dr. Austin a representation of her case, and we expect his opinion and advice to-morrow. In the mean time, we have borrowed an electrical machine from our neighbour Socket, the effect of which she tried yesterday, and the day before, and we think it has been of material service.

She was seized while Hayley and I were walking, and Mr. Greatheed, who called while we were absent, was with her.

I forgot in my last to thank thee for the proposed amendments of thy friend. Whoever he is, make my compliments to him, and thank him. The passages to which he objects have been all altered; and when he shall see them new dressed, I hope he will like them better.

W. C.

XCIII.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

ALL'S WELL,

Weston, June 4, 1792.

Which words I place as conspicuously as possible, and prefix them to my letter, to save you the pain, my friend and brother, of a moment's anxious speculation. Poor Mary proceeds in her amendment still, and improves, I think, even at a swifter rate than when you left her. The stronger she grows, the faster she gathers strength, which is perhaps the natural course of recovery. She walked so well this morning, that she told me at my first

visit she had entirely forgot her illness; and she spoke so distinctly, and had so much of her usual countenance, that, had it been possible, she would have made me forget it too.

Returned from my walk, blown to tatters—found two dear things in the study, your letter, and my Mary! She is bravely well, and your beloved epistle does us both good. I found your kind pencil-note in my song-book, as soon as I came down on the morning of your departure; and Mary was vexed to the heart, that the simpletons who watched her supposed her asleep, when she was not; for she learned soon after you were gone, that you would have peeped at her, had you known her to have been awake. I perhaps might have had a peep too, and therefore was as vexed as she; but if it please God, we shall make ourselves large amends for all lost peeps by and by at Eartham.

W. C.

XCIV.

TO THE REV. THOMAS CARWARDINE

Weston Underwood,
June 11, 1792.

MY DEAR CARWARDINE,

Sooner or later I must address you in that style, since it is impossible that I should love Hayley as I do and not be familiar with his dearest friend; for which reason I may as well begin now. I thank you for your most friendly letter, and for all your most friendly doings in favour of a poor solitary poet, who, till within these few days, had no hopes of service from any body, except of such services as he has received from his own kindred, to whom he has been a burthen many years. But I owe them the justice to add that their kindness has not suffered them to think so.

My affairs have been in the best train possible since my dear brother bard and you have taken them in hand. He left London on Saturday, on which day I received a short note from him, dated the day before, beginning thus,—“Huzza! I have passed an agreeable hour from eight to nine this morning with the Chancellor. Left both him and Lord Kenyon, who was with us, so impressed with warm wishes to serve you, that I am persuaded your old friend Thurlow will accomplish it if possible.”

Thus stands the affair at present. My volumes, your noble gift to Miss Thurlow (noble I mean in respect of the intention of the giver) seem to have procured him this interview; for his first note, requesting an appointment to breakfast, remained unanswered so long that it seemed to be forgotten; but your present, which he found at Romney's, furnished him with a fair occasion for writing a second, and that second burst the

barricado. If I succeed therefore, I owe my fortunes to William of Eartham and his friend of Coln, and if I do not succeed, shall always account myself as much indebted to them both as if I had. What dæmon could whisper in the Chancellor's ear that I am rich, I neither can guess nor wish to do it, but he was doubtless some dæmon who wished to starve me. Perhaps he will be disappointed, as all such dæmons should be. . . .

In answer to your benevolent inquiries concerning my poor Mary, I have to tell you that her recovery proceeds *pedetentim tamen*, slowly, but as fast I suppose as, all things considered, I have any reason to expect. She now walks with very little support from one room to another, and articulates pretty intelligibly. She is this moment brought down into the study, and understanding that I am writing to you, says, a thousand thanks for me to Mr. Carwardine. Should we be so happy as to be able to emigrate in the autumn, you may depend on knowing when and by what route. In the mean time tell us by which we can approach you nearest.

Adieu—may God bless you and yours.

W. COWPER.

XCV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY DEAR MR. BULL,

July 25, 1792

Engaged as I have been ever since I saw you, it was not possible that I should write sooner; and busy as I am at present, it is not without difficulty that I can write even now: but I promised you a letter, and must endeavour, at least, to be as good as my word. How do you imagine I have been occupied these last ten days? In sitting, not on cockatrice eggs, nor yet to gratify a mere idle humour, nor because I was too sick to move; but because my cousin Johnson has an aunt who has a longing desire of my picture, and because he would, therefore, bring a painter from London to draw it. For this purpose I have been sitting, as I say, these ten days; and am heartily glad that my sitting time is over. You have now, I know, a burning curiosity to learn two things, which I may choose whether I will tell you or not. First, who was the painter; and secondly, how he has succeeded. The painter's name is Abbot. You never heard of him, you say. It is very likely; but there is, nevertheless, such a painter, and an excellent one he is. *Multa sunt quæ bonus Bernardus nec vidit, nec audivit*. To your second inquiry I answer, that he has succeeded to admiration. The likeness is so strong,

that when my friends enter the room where my picture is, they start, astonished to see me where they know I am not. Miserable man that you are, to be at Brighton instead of being here, to contemplate this prodigy of art, which, therefore, you can never see; for it goes to London next Monday, to be suspended awhile at Abbot's; and then proceeds into Norfolk, where it will be suspended for ever.

But the picture is not the only prodigy I have to tell you of. A greater belongs to me; and one that you will hardly credit, even on my own testimony. We are on the eve of a journey, and a long one. On this very day se'nnight we set out for Eartham, the seat of my brother bard, Mr. Hayley, on the other side of London, nobody knows where, a hundred and twenty miles off. Pray for us, my friend, that we may have a safe going and return. It is a tremendous exploit, and I feel a thousand anxieties when I think of it. But a promise, made to him when he was here, that we would go if we could, and a sort of persuasion that we can if we will, oblige us to it. The journey and the change of air, together with the novelty to us of the scene to which we are going, may, I hope, be useful to us both; especially to Mrs. Unwin, who had most need of restoratives. She sends her love to you and to Thomas, in which she is sincerely joined by

Your affectionate

W. C.

XCVI.

TO THE REV. MR. GREATHEED¹

MY DEAR SIR,

Eartham, Aug. 6, 1792

Having first thanked you for your affectionate and acceptable letter, I will proceed, as well as I can, to answer your equally affectionate request that I would send you early news of our arrival at Eartham. Here we are in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure-grounds that I have ever seen; but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say that they occupy three sides of a hill, which in Buckinghamshire might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape bounded by the sea, and in one part of it by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library in which I am writing.

¹ The Nonconformist minister of Newport. He was on a visit to Mrs. Unwin when she had her second seizure.

It pleased God to carry us both through the journey with far less difficulty and inconvenience than I expected. I began it indeed with a thousand fears, and when we arrived the first evening at Barnet, found myself oppressed in spirit to a degree that could hardly be exceeded. I saw Mrs. Unwin weary, as she might well be, and heard such a variety of noises, both within the house and without, that I concluded she would get no rest. But I was mercifully disappointed. She rested, though not well, yet sufficiently; and when we finished our next day's journey at Ripley, we were both in better condition, both of body and mind, than on the day preceding. At Ripley we found a quiet inn, that housed, as it happened, that night, no company but ourselves. There we slept well, and rose perfectly refreshed. And except some terrors that I felt at passing over the Sussex hills by moonlight, met with little to complain of till we arrived about ten o'clock at Eartham. Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a Paradise in which we dwell; and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive. Our host mentions you with great respect, and bids me tell you that he esteems you highly. Mrs. Unwin, who is, I think, in some points, already the better for her excursion, unites with mine her best compliments both to yourself and Mrs. Greatheed. I have much to see and enjoy before I can be perfectly apprised of all the delights of Eartham, and will therefore now subscribe myself,

Yours, my dear Sir,

With great sincerity,

W. C.

XCVII.

TO MRS. COURTENAY¹

MY DEAREST CATHARINA,

Eartham, Aug 12, 1792

Though I have travelled far, nothing did I see in my travels that surprised me half so agreeably as your kind letter; for high as my opinion of your good nature is, I had no hopes of hearing from you till I should have written first;—a pleasure which I intended to allow myself the first opportunity.

After three days confinement in a coach, and suffering as we went all that could be suffered from excessive heat and dust, we found ourselves late in the evening at the door of our friend

¹ Catharina Courtenay was the sister-in-law of Mr. John Throckmorton. Her husband changed his name to Courtenay when he succeeded his brother at Weston Hall.

Hayley. In every other respect the journey was extremely pleasant. At the Mitre in Barnet, where we lodged the first evening, we found our friend Mr. Rose, who had walked thither from his house in Chancery Lane to meet us; and at Kingston, where we dined the second day, I found my old and much valued friend General Cowper, whom I had not seen in thirty years, and but for this journey should never have seen again. Mrs. Unwin, on whose account I had a thousand fears before we set out, suffered as little from fatigue as myself, and begins I hope already to feel some beneficial effects from the air of Earham, and the exercise that she takes in one of the most delightful pleasure-grounds in the world. They occupy three sides of a hill, lofty enough to command a view of the sea, which skirts the horizon to a length of many miles, with the Isle of Wight at the end of it. The inland scene is equally beautiful, consisting of a large and deep valley well cultivated, and enclosed by magnificent hills, all crowned with wood. I had, for my part, no conception that a poet could be the owner of such a Paradise; and his house is as elegant as his scenes are charming.

But think not, my dear Catharina, that amidst all these beauties I shall lose the remembrance of the peaceful, but less splendid Weston. Your precincts will be as dear to me as ever, when I return; though when that day will arrive I know not, our host being determined, as I plainly see, to keep us as long as possible. Give my best love to your husband. Thank him most kindly for his attention to the old bard of Greece, and pardon me that I do not send you now an epitaph for Fop. I am not sufficiently recollected to compose even a bagatelle at present; but in due time you shall receive it.¹

Hayley, who will some time or other, I hope, see you at Weston, is already prepared to love you both, and being passionately fond of music, longs much to hear you.

Adieu!

W. C.

XCVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

Earham, Aug. 26, 1792.

I know not how it is, my dearest coz, but in a new scene, and surrounded by strange objects, I find my powers of thinking dissipated to a degree that makes it difficult to me even to write a letter, and even a letter to you; but such a letter as I can, I will, and have the fairest chance to succeed this morning, Hayley,

¹ See the poem *Epitaph on Fop*.

Romney, Hayley's son, and Beau, being all gone together to the sea for bathing. The sea, you must know, is nine miles off, so that unless stupidity prevent, I shall have opportunity to write not only to you, but to poor Hurdis also, who is broken-hearted for the loss of his favourite sister, lately dead; and whose letter, giving an account of it, which I received yesterday, drew tears from the eyes of all our party. My only comfort respecting even yourself is, that you write in good spirits, and assure me that you are in a state of recovery; otherwise I should mourn not only for Hurdis, but for myself, lest a certain event should reduce me, and in a short time too, to a situation as distressing as his; for though Nature designed you only for my cousin, you have had a sister's place in my affections ever since I knew you. The reason is, I suppose, that having no sister, the daughter of my own mother, I thought it proper to have one, the daughter of yours. Certain it is, that I can by no means afford to lose you; and that unless you will be upon honour with me, to give me always a true account of yourself, at least when we are not together, I shall always be unhappy, because always suspicious that you deceive me.

Now for ourselves. I am, without the least dissimulation, in good health: my spirits are about as good as you have ever seen them; and if increase of appetite and a double portion of sleep be advantageous, such are the advantages that I have received from this migration. As to that gloominess of mind, which I have had these twenty years, it cleaves to me even here; and could I be translated to Paradise, unless I left my body behind me, would cleave to me even there also. It is my companion for life, and nothing will ever divorce us. So much for myself. Mrs. Unwin is evidently the better for her jaunt, though by no means as she was before this last attack: still wanting help when she would rise from her seat, and a support in walking; but she is able to use more exercise than she could at home, and moves with rather a less tottering step. God knows what He designs for me; but when I see those who are dearer to me than myself distempered and enfeebled, and myself as strong as in the days of my youth, I tremble for the solitude in which a few years may place me. I wish her and you to die before me, indeed, but not till I am more likely to follow immediately. Enough of this!

Romney has drawn me in crayons, and in the opinion of all here with his best hand, and with the most exact resemblance possible.

The 17th of September is the day on which I intend to leave

Eartham. We shall then have been six weeks resident here; a holiday-time long enough for a man who has much to do. And now farewell!

W. C.

P.S.—Hayley, whose love for me seems to be truly that of a brother, has given me his picture, drawn by Romney about fifteen years ago—an admirable likeness.

XCIX.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

Weston, Sept. 21, 1792.

Chaos himself, even the chaos of Milton, is not surrounded with more confusion, nor has a mind more completely in a hubbub, than I experience at the present moment. At our first arrival, after long absence, we find an hundred orders to servants necessary, a thousand things to be restored to their proper places, and an endless variety of *minutiae* to be adjusted; which, though individually of little importance, are most momentous in the aggregate. In these circumstances I find myself so indisposed to writing, that save to yourself I would on no account attempt it; but to you I will give such a recital as I can of all that has passed since I sent you that short note from Kingston, knowing that if it be a perplexed recital, you will consider the cause, and pardon it. I will begin with a remark, in which I am inclined to think you will agree with me, that there is sometimes more true heroism passing in a corner, and on occasions that make no noise in the world, than has often been exercised by those whom that world esteems her greatest heroes, and on occasions the most illustrious; I hope so at least; for all the heroism I have to boast, and all the opportunities I have of displaying any, are of a private nature. After writing the note I immediately began to prepare for my appointed visit to Ham; but the struggles that I had with my own spirit, labouring as I did under the most dreadful dejection, are never to be told. I would have given the world to have been excused. I went, however, and carried my point against myself with a heart riven asunder. I have reasons for all this anxiety, which I cannot relate now. The visit, however, passed off well, and we returned in the dark to Kingston, I with a lighter heart than I had known since my departure from Eartham,—and Mary, too, for she had suffered hardly less than myself, and chiefly on my account. That night we rested well in our inn, and at twenty minutes

after eight next morning set off for London; exactly at ten we reached Mr. Rose's door; we drank a dish of chocolate with him, and proceeded, Mr. Rose riding with us as far as St. Alban's. From this time we met with no impediment. In the dark, and in a storm, at eight at night, we found ourselves at our own back-door. Mrs. Unwin was very near slipping out of the chair in which she was taken from the chaise, but at last was landed safe. We all have had a good night, and are all well this morning.

God bless you, my dearest brother,

W. C.

C.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

Weston, Oct. 2, 1792

A bad night, succeeded by an east wind, and a sky all in sables, have such an effect on my spirits, that if I did not consult my own comfort more than yours, I should not write to-day, for I shall not entertain you much; yet your letter, though containing no very pleasant tidings, has afforded me some relief. It tells me, indeed, that you have been dispirited yourself, and that poor little Tom,¹ the faithful squire of my Mary, has been seriously indisposed: all this grieves me; but then there is a warmth of heart and a kindness in it, that do me good. I will endeavour not to repay you in notes of sorrow and despondence, though all my sprightly chords seem broken. In truth, one day excepted, I have not seen the day when I have been cheerful, since I left you. My spirits, I think, are almost constantly lower than they were; the approach of winter is perhaps the cause; and if it is, I have nothing better to expect for a long time to come.

Yesterday was a day of assignation with myself, the day of which I said some days before it came, when that day comes I will begin my dissertations. Accordingly when it came I prepared to do so; filled a letter-case with fresh paper, furnished myself with a pretty good pen, and replenished my ink-bottle; but partly from one cause, and partly from another, chiefly however from distress and dejection, after writing and obliterating about six lines, in the composition of which I spent near an hour, I was obliged to relinquish the attempt. An attempt so unsuccessful could have no other effect than to dishearten me; and it has had that effect to such a degree that I know not when I shall find courage to make another. At present I shall certainly

¹ Hayley's son, who was very attentive to Mrs. Unwin at Eartham.

abstain, since at present I cannot well afford to expose myself to the danger of a fresh mortification.

W. C.

CI.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Nov. 9, 1792.

I wish that I were as industrious, and as much occupied as you, though in a different way; but it is not so with me. Mrs. Unwin's great debility, (who is not yet able to move without assistance,) is of itself a hindrance such as would effectually disable me. Till she can work and read, and fill up her time as usual, (all which is at present entirely out of her power,) I may now and then find time to write a letter, but I shall write nothing more. I cannot sit with my pen in my hand, and my books before me, while she is in effect in solitude, silent, and looking at the fire. To this hindrance that other has been added, of which you are already aware,—a want of spirits, such as I have never known, when I was not absolutely laid by, since I commenced an author. How long I shall be continued in these uncomfortable circumstances is known only to Him who, as He will, disposes of us all. I may be yet able to perhaps prepare the first book of the *Paradise Lost* for the press, before it will be wanted; and Johnson himself seems to think there will be no haste for the second. But poetry is my favourite employment, and all my poetical operations are in the mean time suspended; for while a work to which I have bound myself remains unaccomplished I can do nothing else. . . .

Adieu! We expect you at Christmas, and shall therefore rejoice when Christmas comes. Let nothing interfere.

Ever yours,

W. C.

CII.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, Dec. 26, 1792.

That I may not be silent till my silence alarms you, I snatch a moment to tell you that although *toujours triste* I am not worse than usual, but my opportunities of writing are *paucified*, as perhaps Dr. Johnson would have dared to say, and the few that I have are shortened by company.

Give my love to dear Tom, and thank him for his very apposite extract, which I should be happy indeed to turn to any

account. How often do I wish, in the course of every day, that I could be employed once more in poetry, and how often of course that this Miltonic trap had never caught me! The year ninety-two shall stand chronicled in my remembrance as the most melancholy that I have ever known, except the few weeks that I spent at Eartham; and such it has been principally, because being engaged to Milton, I felt myself no longer free for any other engagement. That ill-fated work, impracticable in itself, has made everything else impracticable.

* * * I am very Pindaric, and obliged to be so by the hurry of the hour. My friends are come down to breakfast.

Adieu.

W. C.

CIII.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, Feb. 24, 1793.

. . . Oh! you rogue! what would you give to have such a dream about Milton, as I had about a week since? I dreamed that being in a house in the city, and with much company, looking towards the lower end of the room from the upper end of it, I descried a figure which I immediately knew to be Milton's. He was very gravely, but very neatly attired in the fashion of his day, and had a countenance which filled me with those feelings that an affectionate child has for a beloved father, such, for instance, as Tom has for you. My first thought was wonder, where he could have been concealed so many years; my second, a transport of joy to find him still alive; my third, another transport to find myself in his company; and my fourth, a resolution to accost him. I did so, and he received me with a complacency, in which I saw equal sweetness and dignity. I spoke of his *Paradise Lost*, as every man must, who is worthy to speak of it at all, and told him a long story of the manner in which it affected me, when I first discovered it, being at that time a schoolboy. He answered me by a smile and a gentle inclination of his head. He then grasped my hand affectionately, and with a smile that charmed me, said, "Well, you for your part will do well also"; at last recollecting his great age, (for I understood him to be two hundred years old,) I feared that I might fatigue him by much talking, I took my leave, and he took his, with an air of the most perfect good breeding. His person, his features, his manner, were all so perfectly characteristic, that I am persuaded an apparition of him could not represent him

more completely. This may be said to have been one of the dreams of Pindus, may it not?

How truly I rejoice that you have recovered Guy; that man won my heart the moment I saw him; give my love to him, and tell him I am truly glad he is alive again.

There is much sweetness in those lines from the sonnetteer of Avon, and not a little in dear Tom's,—an earnest, I trust, of good things to come.

With Mary's kind love, I must now conclude myself,
My dear brother, ever yours,

LIPPUS.

CIV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 25, 1793.

Had it not been stipulated between us that, being both at present pretty much engrossed by business, we should write when opportunity offers, I should be frightened at the date of your last: but you will not judge me, I know, by the unfrequency of my letters, nor suppose that my thoughts about you are equally unfrequent. In truth, they are not. No day passes in which you are excluded from them. I am so busy that I do not expect even now to fill my paper. While I write, my poor invalid, who is still unable to amuse herself either with book or needle,¹ sits silent at my side; which makes me, in all my letters, hasten to a conclusion. My only time for study is now before breakfast; and I lengthen it as much as I can by rising early.

I know not that, with respect to our health, we are either better or worse than when you saw us. Mrs. Unwin, perhaps, has gained a little strength; and the advancing spring, I hope, will add to it. As to myself, I am, in body, soul and spirit, *semper idem*. Prayer, I know, is made for me; and sometimes with great enlargement of heart, by those who offer it: and in this circumstance consists the only evidence I can find, that God is still favourably mindful of me, and has not cast me off for ever. . . .

I remain, sincerely yours,

W. C.

¹ Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shune no more,
My Mary.

To Mary, 9-12, written this same year.

CV.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

Weston, May 21, 1793.

You must either think me extremely idle, or extremely busy, that I have made your last very kind letter wait so very long for an answer. The truth however is, that I am neither; but have had time enough to have scribbled to you, had I been able to scribble at all. To explain this riddle I must give you a short account of my proceedings.

I rise at six every morning, and lag till near eleven, when I breakfast. The consequence is, that I am so exhausted as not to be able to write, when the opportunity offers. You will say—"Breakfast before you work, and then your work will not fatigue you." I answer—"Perhaps I might, and your counsel would probably prove beneficial; but I cannot spare a moment for eating in the early part of the morning, having no other time for study." This uneasiness of which I complain is a proof that I am somewhat stricken in years; and there is no other cause by which I can account for it, since I go early to bed, always between ten and eleven, and seldom fail to sleep well. Certain it is, ten years ago I could have done as much, and sixteen years ago did actually much more, without suffering fatigue, or any inconvenience from my labours. How insensibly old age steals on, and how often it is actually arrived before we suspect it! Accident alone,—some occurrence that suggests a comparison of our former with our present selves, affords the discovery. Well! it is always good to be undeceived, especially on an article of such importance. . . .

Adieu, my dearest brother! Give my love to Tom, and thank him for his book, of which I believe need not have deprived him, intending that my readers shall detect the occult instruction contained in Homer's stories for themselves.

W. C.

CVI.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAREST HAYLEY,

Weston, July 7, 1793.

If the excessive heat of this day which forbids me to do any thing else, will permit me to scribble to you, I shall rejoice. To do this is a pleasure to me at all times, but to do it now a double one; because I am in haste to tell you how much I am delighted with your projected quadruple alliance, and to assure you that if it please God to afford me health, spirits, ability,

and leisure, I will not fail to devote them all to the production of my quota of *The Four Ages*.

You are very kind to humour me as you do, and had need be a little touched yourself with all my oddities, that you may know how to administer to mine. All whom I love do so, and I believe it to be impossible to love heartily those who do not. People must not do me good in *their* way, but in my *own*, and then they do me good indeed. My pride, my ambition, and my friendship for you, and the interest I take in my own dear self, will all be consulted and gratified by an arm-in-arm appearance with you in public; and I shall work with more zeal and assiduity at Homer, and, when Homer is finished, at Milton, with the prospect of such a coalition before me. But what shall I do with a multitude of small pieces, from which I intended to select the best, and adding them to *The Four Ages*, to have made a volume? Will there be room for them upon your plan? I have retouched them, and will retouch them again. Some of them will suggest pretty devices to a designer, and in short I have a desire not to lose them.

I am at this moment, with all the imprudence natural to poets, expending nobody knows what in embellishing my premises, or rather the premises of my neighbour Courtenay, which is more poetical still. I have built one summer-house already, with the boards of my old study, and am building another spick and span, as they say. I have also a stone-cutter now at work, setting a bust of my dear old Grecian on a pedestal; and besides all this, I meditate still more that is to be done in the autumn. Your project therefore is most opportune, as any project must needs be that has so direct a tendency to put money into the pocket of one so likely to want it.

Ah brother poet! send me of your shade,
And bid the Zephyrs hasten to my aid!
Or, like a worm unearth'd at noon, I go
Dispatch'd by sunshine, to the shades below.

My poor Mary is as well as the heat will allow her to be, and whether it be cold or sultry, is always affectionately mindful of you and yours,

W. C.

CVII.

TO MRS. COURTENAY

Weston, Nov. 4, 1793.

I seldom rejoice in a day of soaking rain like this; but in this, my dearest Catharina, I do rejoice sincerely, because it affords

me an opportunity of writing to you, which if fair weather had invited us into the orchard-walk at the usual hour, I should not easily have found. I am a most busy man, busy to a degree that sometimes half distracts me; but if complete distraction be occasioned by having the thoughts too much and too long attached to a single point, I am in no danger of it, with such a perpetual whirl are mine whisked about from one subject to another. When two poets meet there are fine doings I can assure you. My Homer finds work for Hayley, and his *Life of Milton* work for me, so that we are neither of us one moment idle. Poor Mrs. Unwin in the mean time sits quiet in her corner, occasionally laughing at us both, and not seldom interrupting us with some question or remark, for which she is constantly rewarded by me with a "Hush—hold your peace." Bless yourself, my dear Catharina, that you are not connected with a poet, especially that you have not two to deal with; ladies who have, may be bidden indeed to hold their peace, but very little peace have they. How should they in fact have any, continually enjoined as they are to be silent? . . .

I have persuaded Hayley to stay a week longer, and again my hopes revive, that he may yet have an opportunity to know my friends before he returns into Sussex. I write amidst a chaos of interruptions: Hayley on one hand spouts Greek, and on the other hand Mrs. Unwin continues talking, sometimes to us, and sometimes, because we are both too busy to attend to her, she holds a dialogue with herself.—Query, is not this a bull—and ought I not instead of dialogue to have said soliloquy?

Adieu! With our united love to all your party, and with ardent wishes soon to see you all at Weston, I remain, my dearest Catharina,

Ever yours,

W. C.

9. DECLINING YEARS

(LETTERS CVIII.—CXIII.)

A few weeks after the invalids had arrived in Norfolk, Johnson took them to the seaside village of Mundesley (where their residence is still shown). Cowper received some little benefit from his stay there, which lasted until October. From there they moved to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham, but the house being unsuitable, they finally went to live with Johnson at East Dereham. Two months later, in December 1796, Mrs. Unwin died, almost unmourned by her wretched companion. Henceforth he worked fitfully at Homer and listened occasionally to books read to him by his host; his state of mind is recorded in *The Castaway*, his saddest and almost his last poem, written in March 1799. Within a few months dropsy set in, and he passed away quietly on 25 April, 1800.

He was buried in Dereham Church, near Mrs. Unwin; a monument was erected to him at Lady Hesketh's orders, and the inscription was composed by Hayley

CVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

Mundesley, near North Walsham, Aug. 27, 1795.

Hopeless as ever, and chiefly to gratify myself by once more setting pen to paper, I address a very few lines to one whom it would be a comfort to me to gratify as much by sending them. The most forlorn of beings I tread a shore under the burthen of infinite despair, that I once trod all cheerfulness and joy. I view every vessel that approaches the coast with an eye of jealousy and fear, lest it arrive with a commission to seize me. But my insensibility, which you say is a mystery to you, because it seems incompatible with such fear, has the effect of courage, and enables me to go forth, as if on purpose to place myself in the way of danger. The cliff is here of a height that it is terrible to look down from; and yesterday evening, by moonlight, I passed sometimes within a foot of the edge of it, from which to have fallen would probably have been to be dashed in pieces. But though to have been dashed in pieces would perhaps have been best for me, I shrunk from the precipice, and am waiting to be dashed in pieces by other means. At two miles distance on the coast is a solitary pillar of rock, that the crumbling cliff has left at the high-water mark. I have visited it twice, and have found it an emblem of myself. Torn from my natural connexions, I stand alone and expect the storm that shall displace me.

I have no expectation that I shall ever see you more, though Samuel assures me that I shall visit Weston again, and that you will meet me there. My terrors, when I left it, would not permit me to say—Farewell for ever—which now I do; wishing, but

vainly wishing to see you yet once more, and equally wishing that I could now as confidently, and as warmly as once I could, subscribe myself affectionately yours; but every feeling that would warrant the doing it, has, as you too well know, long since forsaken the bosom of

W. C.

Mr. Johnson is gone to North Walsham, and knows not that I write.

Mrs. Unwin sends her affectionate respects and compliments.

CIX.

TO MR. BUCHANAN

To interpose a little ease,
Let my frail thoughts dally with false surmise ¹

Mundesley, Sept. 5, 1795.

I will forget for a moment, that to whomsoever I may address myself, a letter from me can no otherwise be welcome, than as a curiosity. To you, Sir, I address this; urged to it by extreme penury of employment, and the desire I feel to learn something of what is doing, and has been done at Weston (my beloved Weston!) since I left it.

The coldness of these blasts, even in the hottest days, has been such, that added to the irritation of the salt spray, with which they are always charged, they have occasioned me an inflammation in the eyelids, which threatened a few days since to confine me entirely; but by absenting myself as much as possible from the beach, and guarding my face with an umbrella, that inconvenience is in some degree abated. My chamber commands a very near view of the ocean, and the ships at high water approach the coast so closely, that a man furnished with better eyes than mine might, I doubt not, discern the sailors from the window. No situation, at least when the weather is clear and bright, can be pleasanter; which you will easily credit, when I add that it imparts something a little resembling pleasure even to me.—Gratify me with news from Weston! If Mr. Gregson, and your neighbours the Courtenays are there, mention me to them in such terms as you see good. Tell me if my poor birds are living? I never see the herbs I used to give them without a recollection of them, and sometimes am ready to gather them, forgetting that I am not at home. Pardon this intrusion!

Mrs. Unwin continues much as usual. . . .

W. C.

¹ *I ycidas*, 152-3

CX.

TO LADY HESKETH

Jan 22, 1796

I little thought ever to have addressed you by letter more. I have become daily and hourly worse, ever since I left Mundsley¹: there I had something like a gleam of hope allowed me, that possibly my life might be granted me for a longer time than I had been used to suppose, though only on the dreadful terms of accumulating future misery on myself, and for no other reason; but even that hope has long since forsaken me, and I now consider this letter as the warrant of my own dreadful end; as the fulfilment of a word heard in better days, at least six and twenty years ago. A word which to have understood at the time when it reached me, would have been, at least might have been, a happiness indeed to me; but my cruel destiny denied me the privilege of understanding any thing that, in the horrible moment that came winged with my immediate destruction, might have served to aid me. You know my story far better than I am able to relate it. Infinite despair is a sad prompter. I expect that in six days' time, at the latest, I shall no longer foresee, but feel the accomplishment of all my fears. Oh, lot of unexampl'd misery incurred in a moment! Oh wretch! to whom death and life are alike impossible! Most miserable at present in this, that being thus miserable I have my senses continued to me, only that I may look forward to the worst. It is certain, at least, that I have them for no other purpose, and but very imperfectly even for this. My thoughts are like loose and dry sand, which the closer it is grasped slips the sooner away. Mr. Johnson reads to me, but I lose every other sentence through the inevitable wanderings of my mind, and experience, as I have these two years, the same shattered mode of thinking on every subject, and on all occasions. If I seem to write with more connexion, it is only because the gaps do not appear.

Adieu.—I shall not be here to receive your answer, neither shall I ever see you more. Such is the expectation of the most desperate and most miserable of all beings.

W. C.

CXI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

July 29, 1798.

DEAR SIR,

Few letters have passed between us, and I was never so incapable of writing as now, nor ever so destitute of a subject.

¹ For Dunham Lodge.

It is long since I received your last, to which I have as yet returned no answer; nor is it possible that, though I write, I should even now reply to it. It contained, I remember, many kind expressions, which would have encouraged, perhaps, and consoled any other than myself; but I was, even then, out of the reach of all such favourable impressions, and am at present less susceptible of them than at any time since I saw you last. I once little thought to see such days as these, for almost in the moment when they found me there was not a man in the world who seemed to himself to have less reason to expect them. This you know; and what can I say of myself that you do not know?

I will only add, therefore, that we are going to the seaside to-morrow, where we are to stay a fortnight; at the end of which time may I expect to find a letter from you directed to me at Dereham?

I remain, in the meantime,
Yours as usual,

WM. COWPER.

Mr. Johnson is well, and desires to be kindly remembered to you.

CXII.

TO LADY HESKETH

DEAR COUSIN,

Mundesley, Oct. 13, 1798.

You describe scenes¹ delightful, but you describe them to one who, if he even saw them, could receive no delight from them,—who has a faint recollection, and so faint as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. The country that you have had in prospect has been always famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of Nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress, will have no eyes to admire her in any. In one day, in one moment I should rather have said, she became an *universal blank* to me, and, though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove, as blindness itself. In this country, if there are not mountains, there are hills; if not broad and deep rivers, yet such as are sufficient to embellish a prospect; and an object still more magnificent than any river, the ocean itself, is almost immediately under the window. Why is scenery like this, I had almost said, why is the very scene, which many years since I could not

¹She was at Clifton.

contemplate without rapture, now become, at the best, an insipid wilderness to me? It neighbours nearly, and as nearly resembles the scenery of Catfield; but with what different perceptions does it present me! The reason is obvious. My state of mind is a medium through which the beauties of Paradise itself could not be communicated with any effect but a painful one.

There is a wide interval between us, which it would be far easier for you than for me to pass. Yet I should in vain invite you. We shall meet no more. I know not what Mr. Johnson said of me in the long letter he addressed to you yesterday, but nothing, I am sure, that could make such an event seem probable.

I remain as usual,

dear cousin,

yours,

WM. COWPER.

CXIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

DEAR SIR,

Dereham, April 11, 1799.

Your last letter so long unanswered may, and indeed must, have proved sufficiently that my state of mind is not now more favourable to the purpose of writing than it was when I received it; for had any alteration in that respect taken place, I should certainly have acknowledged it long since, or at whatsoever time the change had happened, and should not have waited for the present call upon me to return you my thanks at the same time for the letter and for the book which you have been so kind as to send me. Mr. Johnson has read it to me. If it afforded me any amusement, or suggested to me any reflections, they were only such as served to embitter, if possible, still more the present moment, by a sad retrospect to those days when I thought myself secure of an eternity to be spent with the spirits of such men as He whose life afforded the subject of it. But I was little aware of what I had to expect, and that a storm was at hand which in one terrible moment would darken, and in another still more terrible blot out that prospect for ever.

Adieu, dear sir, whom in those days I called dear friend, with feelings that justified the appellation.

I remain yours,

WM. COWPER.

II. REFERENCES TO HIS POETRY

(LETTERS CXIV.—CXLVI.)

The lover of Cowper's poetry must be particularly interested in the letters that refer to his poetical compositions. As we read them, we seem to stand by his elbow as he writes; we follow him as he composes his moral satires, which, strange though it appears, he ranked as equal in merit to *The Task*; in fact, "in the point of subject they are for the most part superior." He prides himself on his originality: "imitation, even of the best models, is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical. . . . I reckon it among my principal advantages, as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years." He emphasises the didactic nature of his poetry: burning to deliver himself of the great Evangelical message which was stirring men from their apathy to religion and gaining converts to Methodism, he sought to turn his reader's thoughts to religion especially through the medium of Nature:

"To trace in Nature's most minute design
The signature and stamp of power divine"—

Retirement, 53-4.

Hence, in *The Task*, all his descriptions "are from Nature: not one of them second-handed," and he erroneously labours the point that "rural ease and leisure" is alone "friendly to the cause of piety and virtue."

The remarks on *John Gilpin* especially attract our attention: we learn that it was written in his saddest mood, "and but for that saddest mood, perhaps had never been written at all"; we are told, too, that within a few months of its first appearance it "has been hacknied in every magazine, in every newspaper, and in every street."

Cowper refers to the great pains that he took over his compositions—he was as meticulously careful as Pope in this respect—and so we can faintly realise the enormous amount of time and labour that he expended on his translation of Homer, a work that, for all his efforts, ranks much lower than the version by Pope, which he so despised for its "tawdry descriptions" and "tuneful diction."

CXIV. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb 4, 1781

We have waited I suppose with equal impatience for a letter. Our last dispatches crossed each other, so that each of us has claimed the posteriority, the epistolary race being always won by him that comes in last. This however has not been the only reason of my silence. I have been very busy in my way, and ere long you will see the fruit of my labour. I shall say nothing of it at present, except that *Truth*, though long since finished, must be postponed to this last production, and that the *Progress*

of Error itself must not take the lead of it. *Truth* will be seasonable at any time, and though the *Progress of Error* has some connexion with the present day, it is not so closely related to the occurrences of it as the new one, which has the name of *Table Talk*. I have almost finished the copy of it which I intend for you, but cannot send it till from that I have transcribed another for myself, the original being written on so many scraps and scraps that it would be very troublesome to range them, and indeed I have no perfect copy of it but the fair one. I have not numbered the lines, but I suspect that it is longer than either of the others.¹ Now I believe I shall hang up my harp for the remainder of the year, and,

Since Eighty-one has had so much to do,
Postpone what yet is left till Eighty-two. . .

Yours, my dear Sir,

WM. COWPER.

CXV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb 18, 1781

I send you *Table Talk*. It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favour of religion.² In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweet-meat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act: one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any, and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it: now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt

¹ It is the longest of the three by about one hundred and fifty lines.

² Content if thus sequestered I may raise
A monitor's, though not a poet's, praise,
And while I teach an art too little known,
To close life wisely, may not waste my own.

it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir, with our joint love,
W. C.

CXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 1, 1781.

Your mother says I *must* write, and *must* admits of no apology; I might otherwise plead, that I have nothing to say, that I am weary, that I am dull, that it would be more convenient therefore for you, as well as for myself, that I should let it alone; but all these pleas, and whatever pleas besides either disinclination, indolence, or necessity might suggest, are overruled, as they ought to be, the moment a lady adduces her irrefragable argument, *you must*. You have still however one comfort left, that what I must write, you may, or may not read, just as it shall please you; unless Lady Anne¹ at your elbow should say, you *must* read it, and then like a true knight you will obey without looking out for a remedy. . . .

In the press, and speedily will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, Poems by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq. You may suppose, by the size of the publication, that the greatest part of them have been long kept secret, because you yourself have never seen them: but the truth is, that they are most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. Two-thirds of the compilation will be occupied by four pieces, the first of which sprung up in the month of December, and the last of them in the month of March. They contain, I suppose, in all, about two thousand five hundred lines; are known, or to be known in due time, by the names of *Table Talk—The Progress of Error—Truth—Expostulation*. Mr. Newton writes a Preface, and Johnson is the publisher. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you, till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world, (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing,) has been this; that till within these few days, I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure

¹ William Unwin's wife.

them; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine, to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks, whether any book-seller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity, that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come. I shall be glad of my Translations from Vincent Bourne, in your next frank.¹ My Muse will lay herself at your feet immediately on her first public appearance.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXVII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

May 9, 1781.

I am in the press, and it is vain to deny it. But how mysterious is the conveyance of intelligence from one end to the other of your great city!—Not many days since, except one man, and he but a little taller than yourself, all London was ignorant of it; for I do not suppose that the public prints have yet announced this most agreeable tidings, the title-page, which is the basis of the advertisement, having so lately reached the publisher: and now it is known to you, who live at least two miles distant from my confidant upon the occasion.

My labours are principally the production of the last winter; all indeed, except a few of the minor pieces. When I can find no other occupation, I think, and when I think, I am very apt to do it in rhyme. Hence it comes to pass that the season of the year which generally pinches off the flowers of poetry, unfolds mine, such as they are, and crowns me with a winter garland.² In this respect therefore, I and my contemporary bards are by no means upon a par. They write when the delightful influences of fine weather, fine prospects, and a brisk motion of the animal spirits, make the poetry almost the language of Nature; and I, when icicles depend from all the leaves of the Parnassian laurel, and when a reasonable man would as little expect to succeed in verse, as to hear a blackbird whistle. This must be my apology to you for whatever want of fire and animation you

¹ Letters that were "franked," or signed by a member of Parliament, could be sent free of postage. Cowper obtained many of these franks for his correspondence and for the manuscripts that he sent to his publishers.

² O winter! ruler of the inverted year . . .
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest.

The Task, VI. 120 and 128.

may observe in what you will shortly have the perusal of. As to the public, if they like me not, there is no remedy. A friend will weigh and consider all disadvantages, and make as large allowances as an author can wish, and larger perhaps than he has any right to expect; but not so the world at large; whatever they do not like, they will not by any apology be persuaded to forgive, and it would be in vain to tell *them*, that I wrote my verses in January, for they would immediately reply, "Why did not you write them in May?" A question that might puzzle a wiser head than we poets are generally blessed with.

W. C.

CXVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

August 25, 1781.

We rejoice with you sincerely in the birth of another son, and in the prospect you have of Mrs. Unwin's recovery; may your three children, and the next three, when they shall make their appearance, prove so many blessings to their parents, and make you wish that you had twice the number. But what made you expect daily that you should hear from me? Letter for letter is the law of all correspondence whatsoever, and because I wrote last, I have indulged myself for some time in expectation of a sheet from you. Not that I govern myself entirely by the punctilio of reciprocation, but having been pretty much occupied of late, I was not sorry to find myself at liberty to exercise my discretion, and furnished with a good excuse if I chose to be silent.

I expected, as you remember, to have been published last spring, and was disappointed. The delay has afforded me an opportunity to increase the quantity of my publication by about a third; and if my muse has not forsaken me, which I rather suspect to be the case, may possibly yet add to it. I have a subject in hand, which promises me a great abundance of poetical matter, but which, for want of a something I am not able to describe, I cannot at present proceed with. The name of it is *Retirement*, and my purpose, to recommend the proper improvement of it, to set forth the requisites for that end, and to enlarge upon the happiness of that state of life, when managed as it ought to be.¹ In the course of my journey through this

¹ Yet let a poet

Risk an intrusion on thy pensive mood,
And woo and win thee to thy proper good.
Pastoral images and still retreats,
Umbrageous walks and solitary seats

Retirement, 253-8.

ample theme, I should wish to touch upon the characters, the deficiencies, and the mistakes of thousands, who enter on a scene of retirement, unqualified for it in every respect, and with such designs as have no tendency to promote either their own happiness or that of others. But as I have told you before, there are times when I am no more a poet than I am a mathematician; and when such a time occurs, I always think it better to give up the point, than to labour it in vain. I shall yet again be obliged to trouble you for franks; the addition of three thousand lines, or near that number, having occasioned a demand which I did not always foresee: but your obliging friend, and your obliging self, having allowed me the liberty of application, I make it without apology. . . .

CXIX.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Oct. 19, 1781.

Your fear lest I should think you unworthy of my correspondence, on account of your delay to answer, may change sides now, and more properly belongs to me. It is long since I received your last, and yet I believe I can say truly, that not a post has gone by me since the receipt of it that has not reminded me of the debt I owe you, for your obliging and unreserved communications both in prose and verse, especially for the latter, because I consider them as marks of your peculiar confidence. The truth is, I have been such a verse-maker myself, and so busy in preparing a volume for the press, which I imagine will make its appearance in the course of the winter, that I hardly had leisure to listen to the calls of any other engagement. It is however finished, and gone to the printer's, and I have nothing now to do with it, but to correct the sheets as they are sent to me, and consign it over to the judgement of the public. It is a bold undertaking at this time of day, when so many writers of the greatest abilities have gone before, who seem to have anticipated every valuable subject, as well as all the graces of poetical embellishment, to step forth into the world in the character of a bard, especially when it is considered, that luxury, idleness, and vice, have debauched the public taste, and that nothing hardly is welcome but childish fiction, or what has at least a tendency to excite a laugh. I thought, however, that I had stumbled upon some subjects, that had never before been poetically treated, and upon some others, to which I imagined it would not be difficult to give an air of novelty by the manner of treating them. My sole drift is to be useful; a

point which however I knew I should in vain aim at, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these two strings upon my bow, and by the help of both have done my best to send my arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh, before they will be called upon to correct that levity, and peruse me with a more serious air. As to the effect, I leave it alone in His hands, who can alone produce it: neither prose nor verse can reform the manners of a dissolute age, much less can they inspire a sense of religious obligation, unless assisted and made efficacious by the Power who superintends the truth He has vouchsafed to impart. . . .

W. C.

CXX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 24, 1781.

. . . I am much indebted to Mr. Smith for more franks, and still more obliged by the handsome note with which he accompanied them. He has furnished me sufficiently for the present occasion, and by his readiness, and obliging manner of doing it, encouraged me to have recourse to him in case another exigence of the same kind should offer. A French author I was reading last night says, He that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon the first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume. At present, however, I do not feel myself so disposed; and, indeed, he that would write, should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that, being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own. I reckon it among my principal advantages, as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation, even of the best models, is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire. But enough of this. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXXI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 4, 1782.

. . . You tell me that *John Gilpin* made you laugh tears, and that the ladies at court are delighted with my Poems. Much good may they do them! May they become as wise as the writer wishes them, and then they will be much happier than he! I know there is in the book that wisdom which cometh from above, because it was from above that I received it. May they receive it too! For whether they drink it out of the cistern, or whether it falls upon them immediately from the clouds, as it did on me, it is all one. It is the water of life, which whosoever drinketh shall thirst no more. As to the famous horseman above mentioned, he and his feats are an inexhaustible source of merriment. At least we find him so, and seldom meet without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them. You are perfectly at liberty to deal with them as you please. *Auctore tantum anonymo imprimantur*; and when printed, send me a copy. . . .

Yours, my dear Unwin,

W. C.

CXXII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Nov. 18, 1782

. . . I little thought when I was writing the history of *John Gilpin* that he would appear in print—I intended to laugh, and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laughs, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told, as we have.—Well—they do not always laugh so innocently, or at so small an expense—for in a world like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle*—a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whencesoever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend, nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity—a melancholy, that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and, but for

that saddest mood, perhaps had never been written at all. To say truth, it would be but a shocking vagary, should the mariners on board a ship buffeted by a terrible storm, employ themselves in fiddling and dancing: yet sometimes much such a part act I.

I hear from Mrs. Newton, that some great persons have spoken with great approbation of a certain book.—Who they are, and what they have said, I am to be told in a future letter. The Monthly Reviewers in the mean time have satisfied me well enough.

Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

CXXIII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb 13 and 20, 1783

In writing to you I never want a subject. Self is always at hand, and self with its concerns is always interesting to a friend.

You may think, perhaps, that having commenced poet by profession, I am always writing verses. Not so. I have written nothing, at least finished nothing, since I published, except a certain facetious history of John Gilpin, which Mr. Unwin would send to the *Public Advertiser*. Perhaps you might read it without suspecting the author.

My book procures me favours, which my modesty will not permit me to specify, except one which, modest as I am, I cannot suppress,—a very handsome letter from Dr. Franklin at Passy. These fruits it has brought me.

I have been refreshing myself with a walk in the garden, where I find that January (who according to Chaucer was the husband of May) being dead, February has married the widow.

Yours, &c.,

W. C.

CXXIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

August 4, 1783.

. . . I am glad you were pleased with my Latin ode,¹ and indeed with my English dirge,² as much as I was myself. The tune³ laid me under a disadvantage, obliging me to write in Alexandrines; which I suppose would suit no ear but a French one; neither did I intend any thing more than that the subject

¹ Entitled *In Submersionem Navigii, Cui Georgius Regale Nomen Inditum*.

² The celebrated English poem on the same subject, "Loss of the Royal George."

³ Handel's March from *Scipio*.

and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music. The ballad is a species of poetry, I believe, peculiar to this country, equally adapted to the drollest and the most tragical subjects. Simplicity and ease are its proper characteristics. Our forefathers excelled in it; but we moderns have lost the art. It is observed, that we have few good English odes. But to make amends, we have many excellent ballads, not inferior perhaps in true poetical merit to some of the very best odes that the Greek or Latin languages have to boast of. It is a sort of composition I was ever fond of, and if graver matters had not called me another way, should have addicted myself to it more than to any other. I inherit a taste for it from my father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that way were produced. What can be prettier than Gay's ballad, or rather Swift's, Arbuthnot's, Pope's, and Gay's, in the *What do ye call it*—" 'Twas when the seas were roaring?" I have been well informed that they all contributed, and that the most celebrated association of clever fellows this country ever saw did not think it beneath them to unite their strength and abilities in the composition of a song. The success however answered to their wishes, and our puny days will never produce such another. The ballads that Bourne has translated, beautiful in themselves, are still more beautiful in his version of them, infinitely surpassing, in my judgement, all that Ovid or Tibullus have left behind them. They are quite as elegant, and far more touching and pathetic than the tenderest strokes of either. . . .

Yours ever,

W. C.

CXXV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb. 22, 1784.

I congratulate you on the thaw; I suppose it is an universal blessing, and probably felt all over Europe. I myself am the better for it, who wanted nothing that might make the frost supportable; what reason therefore have they to rejoice, who, being in want of all things, were exposed to its utmost rigour! The ice in my ink, however, is not yet dissolved. It was long before the frost seized it, but at last it prevailed. The Sofa¹ has consequently received little or no addition since. It consists at present of four books and a part of a fifth; when the sixth

¹ It will be remembered that *The Task* set him by Lady Austen was to "write upon this sofa."

is finished, the work is accomplished, but if I may judge by my present inability, that period is at a considerable distance.

I owe you thanks for your kind remembrance of me in your letter sent me on occasion of your departure, and as many for that which I received last night. I should have answered, had I known where a line or two from me might find you; but, uncertain whether you were at home or abroad, my diligence, I confess, wanted the necessary spur. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

CXXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM.

May 8, 1784.

. . . You do well to make your letters merry ones, though not very merry yourself. and that both for my sake and your own; for your own sake, because it sometimes happens, that by assuming an air of cheerfulness we become cheerful in reality; and for mine, because I have always more need of a laugh than a cry, being somewhat disposed to melancholy by natural temperament, as well as by other causes.

It was long since, and even in the infancy of *John Gilpin*, recommended to me by a lady now at Bristol, to write a sequel. But having always observed that authors, elated with the success of a first part, have fallen below themselves, when they have attempted a second, I had more prudence than to take her counsel. I want you to read the history of that hero, published by Bladon, and to tell me what it is made of. But buy it not; for, puffed as it is in the papers, it can be but a bookseller's job, and must be dear at the price of two shillings. In the last packet but one that I received from Johnson, he asked me if I had any improvements of *John Gilpin* in hand, or if I designed any; for that to print only the original again would be to publish what has been hacknied in every magazine, in every newspaper, and in every street. I answered, that the copy which I sent him contained two or three small variations from the first, except which I had none to propose, and that if he thought him now too trite to make a part of my volume, I should willingly acquiesce in his judgement. I take it for granted therefore that he will not bring up the rear of my Poems according to my first intention, and shall not be sorry for the omission. It may spring from a principle of pride; but spring it from what it may, I feel, and have long felt, a disinclination to a public avowal that he is mine; and since he became so popular, I

have felt it more than ever; not that I should have expressed a scruple, if Johnson had not. But a fear has suggested itself to me, that I might expose myself to a charge of vanity by admitting him into my book, and that some people would impute it to me as a crime. Consider what the world is made of, and you will not find my suspicions chimerical. Add to this, that when, on correcting the latter part of the fifth book of the *Task*, I came to consider the solemnity and sacred nature of the subjects there handled, it seemed to me an incongruity at the least, not to call it by a harsher name, to follow up such premises with such a conclusion. I am well content therefore with having laughed, and made others laugh, and will build my hopes of success, as a poet, upon more important matter.

In our printing business we now jog on merrily enough. The coming week will I hope bring me to an end of the *Task*, and the next fortnight to an end of the whole. I am glad to have Paley on my side in the affair of education. He is certainly on all subjects a sensible man, and on such, a wise one. But I am mistaken, if *Tirocinium* do not make some of my friends angry, and procure me enemies not a few. There is a sting in verse, that prose neither has, nor can have; and I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, and abomination, and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should, if possible, be opened to perceive it.

This is indeed an author's letter; but it is an author's letter to his friend. If you will be the friend of an author, you must expect such letters. Come July, and come yourself, with as many of your exterior selves as can possibly come with you.

Yours, my dear William, affectionately and with your mother's remembrances,

W. C.

CXXVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM.

Oct. 10, 1784.

I send you four quires of verse, which having sent, I shall dismiss from my thoughts, and think no more of, till I see them in print. I have not after all found time or industry enough to give the last hand to the points. I believe, however, they are not very erroneous, though in so long a work, and in a work that requires nicety in this particular, some inaccuracies will escape. Where you find any, you will oblige me by correcting them.

In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such subjects I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming at least at usefulness: it were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet; but to contemplate the world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend, were to approve it. From this charge at least I shall be clear, for I have neither tacitly nor expressly flattered either its characters or its customs. I have paid one, and only one compliment, which was so justly due, that I did not know how to withhold it, especially having so fair an occasion;—I forget myself, there is another in the first book to Mr. Throckmorton,¹—but the compliment I mean is to Mr. Smith.² It is, however, so managed, that nobody but himself can make the application, and you, to whom I disclose the secret; a delicacy on my part, which so much delicacy on his obliged me to the observance of.

What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance,—and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega, or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience.

My descriptions are all from nature: not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience: not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I have varied as much as I could, (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string,) I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed.

If the work cannot boast a regular plan, (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible,) it may yet

¹ See Letter No. LVI.

²

The man who, when the distant poor
Need help, denies them nothing but his name.

The Task, IV. 427–8.

boast, that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency; to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.¹

If it pleases you I shall be happy, and collect from your pleasure in it an omen of its general acceptance.

Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

CXXVIII. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Oct. 20, 1784.

Your letter has relieved me from some anxiety, and given me a good deal of positive pleasure. I have faith in your judgement, and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business; and the author must know little of his own heart, who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production; and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery that he had written five thousand lines in vain? The poem however which you have in hand will not of itself make a volume so large as the last, or as a bookseller would wish. I say this, because when I had sent Johnson five thousand verses, he applied for a thousand more. Two years since, I began a piece which grew to the length of two hundred, and there stopped. I have lately resumed it, and (I believe) shall finish it. But the subject is fruitful, and will not be comprised in a smaller compass than seven or eight hundred verses. It turns on the question, whether an education at school or at home be preferable, and I shall give the preference to the latter. I mean that it shall pursue the track of the former,—that is to say, that it shall visit Stock in its way to publication. My design also is to inscribe it to you. But you must see it first; and if, after having seen it, you should have any objection, though it should be no bigger than the tittle of an *1*, I will deny myself that pleasure, and find no fault with your refusal. I have not been without thoughts of adding *John Gilpin* at the tail of all. He

¹ Hail, therefore, patroness of health and ease
And contemplation, heart-consoling joys
And harmless pleasures, in the thronged abode
Of multitudes unknown, hail rural life!

has made a good deal of noise in the world, and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation: but in this article I am entirely under your judgement, and mean to be set down by it. All these together will make an octavo like the last. I should have told you, that the piece which now employs me, is in rhyme. I do not intend to write any more blank. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition. If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry—"Humph!"—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—"that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not."—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawker, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present day. He may be a man of taste as well as of learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and may serve us, if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no farther trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors, who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

CXXIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Oct. 30, 1784.

. . . I am again at Johnson's in the shape of a poem in blank verse, consisting of six books, and called *The Task*. I began it about this time twelvemonth, and writing sometimes an hour in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours, have

lately finished it. I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it. My bookseller I suppose will be as tardy as before. I do not expect to be born into the world till the month of March, when I and the crocuses shall peep together. You may assure yourself that I shall take my first opportunity to wait on you. I mean likewise to gratify myself by obtruding my Muse upon Mr. Bacon.

Adieu, my dear friend! we are well, and love you.

Yours, and Mrs. Newton's.

W. C.

CXXX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN¹

MY DEAR FRIEND.

Sept. 7, 1780.

As many gentlemen as there are in the world, who have children, and heads capable of reflecting on the important subject of their education, so many opinions there are about it; many of them just and sensible, though almost all differing from each other. With respect to the education of boys, I think they are generally made to draw in Latin and Greek trammels too soon. It is pleasing, no doubt, to a parent, to see his child already in some sort a proficient in those languages, at an age when most others are entirely ignorant of them; but hence it often happens, that a boy, who could construe a fable in *Æsop* at six or seven years of age, having exhausted his little stock of attention and diligence in making that notable acquisition, grows weary of his task, conceives a dislike for study, and perhaps makes but a very indifferent progress afterwards. The mind and the body have in this respect a striking resemblance of each other. In childhood they are both nimble, but not strong; they can skip and frisk about with wonderful agility, but hard labour spoils them both. In maturer years they become less active, but more vigorous, more capable of a fixed application, and can make themselves sport with that which a little earlier would have affected them with intolerable fatigue. I should recommend it to you therefore,—(but after all you must judge for yourself), to allot the two next years of little John's scholarship to writing and arithmetic, together with which, for variety's sake, and

¹ The next two letters have been inserted here as they bear (especially No. CXXXI.) on the subject-matter of the *Tirocinium*.

because it is capable of being formed into an amusement, I would mingle geography, a science (which, if not attended to betimes, is seldom made an object of much consideration) essentially necessary to the accomplishment of a gentleman, yet (as I know by sad experience) imperfectly, if at all, inculcated in the schools. Lord Spencer's son, when he was four years of age, knew the situation of every kingdom, country, city, river, and remarkable mountain in the world. For this attainment, which I suppose his father had never made, he was indebted to a plaything; having been accustomed to amuse himself with those maps which are cut into several compartments, so as to be thrown into a heap of confusion, that they may be put together again with an exact coincidence of all their angles and bearings, so as to form a perfect whole.

If he begins Latin and Greek at eight, or even at nine years of age, it is surely soon enough. Seven years, the usual allowance for those acquisitions, are more than sufficient for the purpose, especially with his readiness in learning, for you would hardly wish to have him qualified for the university before fifteen, a period, in my mind, much too early for it, and when he could hardly be trusted there without the utmost danger to his morals. Upon the whole, you will perceive that in my judgement the difficulty, as well as the wisdom, consists more in bridling in, and keeping back, a boy of his parts, than in pushing him forward. If, therefore, at the end of the two next years, instead of putting a grammar into his hand, you should allow him to amuse himself with some agreeable writers upon the subject of natural philosophy for another year. I think it would answer well. There is a book called *Cosmotheoria Puerilis*, there are Derham's *Physico-* and *Astro-theology*, together with several others, in the same manner, very intelligible even to a child, and full of useful instruction.

Plums and pears in my next.

W. C.

CXXXI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Oct. 5, 1780.

Now for the sequel.¹ You have anticipated one of my arguments in favour of a private education, therefore I need say but little about it. The folly of supposing that the mother-tongue, in some respects the most difficult of all tongues, may

¹ A reference to a letter written on 17 September.

be acquired without a teacher, is predominant in all the public schools that I have ever heard of. To pronounce it well, to speak and to write it with fluency and elegance, are no easy attainments; not one in fifty of those who pass through Westminster and Eton, arrive at any remarkable proficiency in these accomplishments; and they that do are more indebted to their own study and application for it, than to any instruction received there. In general, there is nothing so pedantic as the style of a schoolboy, if he aims at any style at all; and if he does not, he is of course inelegant, and perhaps ungrammatical. A defect, no doubt, in great measure owing to the want of cultivation; for the same lad that is often commended for his Latin, frequently would deserve to be whipped for his English, if the fault were not more his master's than his own. I know not where this evil is so likely to be prevented as at home,—supposing always, nevertheless (which is the case in your instance), that the boy's parents, and their acquaintance, are persons of elegance and taste themselves. For to converse with those who converse with propriety, and to be directed to such authors as have refined and improved the language by their productions, are advantages which he cannot elsewhere enjoy in an equal degree. And though it requires some time to regulate the taste, and fix the judgement, and these effects must be gradually wrought even upon the best understanding, yet I suppose much less time will be necessary for the purpose than could at first be imagined, because the opportunities of improvement are continual.

I promised to say little on this topic, and I have said so much that if I had not a frank I must burn my letter and begin again.

A public education is often recommended as the most effectual remedy for that bashful and awkward constraint, so epidemical among the youth of our country. But I verily believe that instead of being a cure, it is often the cause of it. For seven or eight years of his life, the boy has hardly seen or conversed with a man, or a woman, except the maids at his boarding-house. A gentleman or a lady are consequently such novelties to him, that he is perfectly at a loss to know what sort of behaviour he should reserve before them. He plays with his buttons, or the strings of his hat, he blows his nose, and hangs down his head.¹ is conscious of his own deficiency to a degree that makes him quite unhappy, and trembles lest any one

¹ He blushes, hangs his head, is shy and strange

should speak to him, because that would quite overwhelm him. Is not all this miserable shyness evidently the effect of his education? To me it appears to be so. If he saw good company every day, he would never be terrified at the sight of it, and a room full of ladies and gentlemen would alarm him no more than the chairs they sit on. Such is the effect of custom.

I need add nothing further on this subject, because I believe little John is as likely to be exempted from this weakness as most young gentlemen we shall meet with. He seems to have his father's spirit in this respect, in whom I could never discern the least trace of bashfulness, though I have often heard him complain of it. Under your management, and the influence of your example, I think he can hardly fail to escape it. If he does, he escapes that which makes many a man uncomfortable for life; and has ruined not a few, by forcing them into mean and dishonourable company, where only they could be free and cheerful.

Connexions formed at school are said to be lasting, and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are, whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast of. For my own part, I found such friendships, though warm enough in their commencement, surprisingly liable to extinction¹; and of seven or eight, whom I had selected for intimates out of about three hundred, in ten years' time not one was left me. The truth is, that there may be, and often is, an attachment of one boy to another, that looks very like a friendship; and while they are in circumstances that enable them mutually to oblige and to assist each other, promises well, and bids fair to be lasting. But they are no sooner separated from each other, by entering into the world at large, than other connexions, and new employments, in which they no longer share together, efface the remembrance of what passed in earlier days, and they become strangers to each other for ever. Add to this, that the *man* frequently differs so much from the *boy*,—his principles, manners, temper, and conduct, undergo so great an alteration,—that we no longer recognise in him our old playfellow, but find him utterly unworthy and unfit for the place he once held in our affections.

¹ Besides, school friendships are not always found,
Though fair in promise, permanent and sound.

To close this article, as I did the last, by applying myself immediately to the present concern,—little John is happily placed above all occasion for dependence upon such precarious hopes, and need not be sent to school in quest of some great man in embryo, who may possibly make his fortune.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXXXII. TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY GOOD FRIEND,

Nov. 8, 1784.

The Task, as you know, is gone to the press: since it went I have been employed in writing another poem, which I am now transcribing, and which, in a short time, I design shall follow. It is intitled, *Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools*: the business, and purpose of it are, to censure the want of discipline, and the scandalous inattention to morals, that obtain in them, especially in the largest; and to recommend private tuition as a mode of education preferable on all accounts; to call upon fathers to become tutors of their own sons, where that is practicable; to take home a domestic tutor where it is not¹; and if neither can be done, to place them under the care of such a man as he to whom I am writing; some rural parson, whose attention is limited to a few. . . .

Yours, with our joint love to Mrs. Bull,

WM. COWPER.

CXXXIII. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 27, 1784.

All the interest that you take in my new publication, and all the pleas that you urge in behalf of your right to my confidence, the moment I had read your letter, struck me as so many proofs of your regard; of a friendship, in which distance and time make no abatement. But it is difficult to adjust opposite claims to the satisfaction of all parties. I have done my best, and must leave it to your candour to put a just interpretation upon all that has passed, and to give me credit for it, as a certain truth, that whatever seeming defects, in point of attention and attachment to you, my conduct on this occasion may have appeared to have been chargeable with, I am in reality as clear of all real ones as you would wish to find me.

I send you enclosed, in the first place, a copy of the advertise-

¹ In him, thy well-appointed proxy see,
Armed for a work too difficult for thee.

ment to the reader, which accounts for my title, not otherwise easily accounted for;—secondly, what is called an argument, or a summary of the contents of each book, more circumstantial and diffuse by far than that which I have sent to the press. It will give you a pretty accurate acquaintance with my matter, though the tenons and mortises, by which the several passages are connected, and let into each other, cannot be explained in a syllabus;—and lastly, an extract, as you desired. The subject of it I am sure will please you; and as I have admitted into my description no images but what are scriptural, and have aimed as exactly as I could at the plain and simple sublimity of the Scripture language, I have hopes the manner of it may please you too. As far as the numbers and diction are concerned, it may serve pretty well for a sample of the whole. But the subjects being so various, no single passage can in all respects be a specimen of the book at large.

My principal purpose is to allure the reader, by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishments, to the reading of what may profit him. Subordinately to this, to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis, that beggars and exhausts the country, by evacuating it of all its principal inhabitants: and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, wherever I find them. I have not spared the Universities.¹ A letter which appeared in the *General Evening Post* of Saturday, said to have been received by a general officer, and by him sent to the press, as worthy of public notice, and which has all the appearance of authenticity, would alone justify the severest censure of those bodies, if any such justification were wanted. By way of supplement to what I have written on this subject, I have added a poem, called *Tirocinium*, which is in rhyme. It treats of the scandalous relaxation of discipline, that obtains in almost all schools universally, but especially in the largest, which are so negligent in the article of morals, that boys are debauched in general the moment they are capable of being so. It recommends the office of tutor to the father, where there is no real impediment, the expedient of a domestic tutor, where there is; and the disposal of boys into the hands of a respectable country clergyman, who limits his attention to two, in

¹ So colleges and halls neglected much
 Their good old friend, and Discipline at length
 O'erlooked and unemployed, fell sick and died.

all cases where they cannot be conveniently educated at home. Mr. Unwin happily affording me an instance in point, the poem is inscribed to him. You will now I hope command your hunger to be patient, and be satisfied with the luncheon that I send, till dinner comes. That piecemeal perusal of the work, sheet by sheet, would be so disadvantageous to the work itself, and therefore so uncomfortable to me, that, I dare say, you will waive your desire of it. A poem, thus disjointed, cannot possibly be fit for anybody's inspection but the author's.

Tully's rule—"Nulla dies sine linea"—will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another. But I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhyme, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with. . . .

Adieu, my dear friend!

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

CXXXIV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 11, 1784

Having imitated no man, I may reasonably hope that I shall not incur the disadvantage of a comparison with my betters. Milton's manner was peculiar. So is Thomson's. He that should write like either of them, would, in my judgement, deserve the name of a copyist, but not of a poet. A judicious and sensible reader therefore, like yourself, will not say that my manner is not good, because it does not resemble theirs, but will rather consider what it is in itself. Blank verse is susceptible of much greater diversification of manner, than verse in rhyme: and why the modern writers of it have all thought proper to cast their numbers alike, I know not. Certainly it was not necessity that compelled them to it. I flatter myself, however, that I have avoided that sameness with others, which would entitle me to nothing but a share in one common oblivion with them all. It is possible that, as the reviewer of my former volume found cause to say that he knew not to what class of writers to refer me, the reviewer of this, whosoever he shall be, may see occasion

to remark the same singularity. At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond, than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit anything by this volume that I gained by the last.

As to the title, I take it to be the best that is to be had. It is not possible that a book, including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all. In such a case, it seemed almost necessary to accommodate the name to the incident that gave birth to the poem; nor does it appear to me, that because I performed more than my task, therefore *The Task* is not a suitable title. A house would still be a house, though the builder of it should make it ten times as big as he at first intended. I might indeed, following the example of the Sunday newsmonger, call it the *Olio*. But I should do myself wrong; for though it have much variety, it has, I trust, no confusion.

For the same reason none of the interior titles apply themselves to the contents at large of that book to which they belong. They are, every one of them, taken either from the leading, (I should say the introductory,) passage of that particular book, or from that which makes the most conspicuous figure in it. Had I set off with a design to write upon a gridiron, and had I actually written near two hundred lines upon that utensil, as I have upon the *Sofa*, the *Gridiron* should have been my title. But the *Sofa* being, as I may say, the starting-post from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account, and was very worthily advanced to the titular honour it enjoys, its right being at least so far a good one, that no word in the language could pretend a better.

The *Time-piece* appears to me (though by some accident the import of that title has escaped you) to have a degree of propriety beyond the most of them. The book to which it belongs¹ is intended to strike the hour that gives notice of approaching judgement, and dealing pretty largely in the *signs* of the *times*, seems to be denominated, as it is, with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the subject. . . .

Believe me,

Your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

Your letters are gone to their address. The oysters were very good.

¹ Book II.

CXXXV. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Olney, Jan. 15, 1785

. . . The death of Dr. Johnson¹ has set a thousand scribblers to work, and me among the rest. While I lay in bed, waiting till I could reasonably hope that the parlour might be ready for me, I invoked the Muse, and composed the following

EPITAPH

Here Johnson lies—a sage, by all allow'd,
Whom to have bred, may well make England proud;
Whose prose was Eloquence, by Wisdom taught,
The graceful vehicle of virtuous thought;
Whose verse may claim, grave, masculine, and strong,
Superior praise to the mere poet's song;
Who many a noble gift from Heav'n possess'd,
And faith at last, alone worth all the rest.
O man, immortal by a double prize,
By fame on earth, by glory in the skies!

It is destined, I believe, to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which I consider as a respectable repository for small matters, which, when entrusted to a newspaper, can expect but the duration of a day. But Nichols having at present a small piece of mine in his hands, not yet printed,—(it is called the *Poplar Field*,² and I suppose you have it,) I wait till his obstetrical aid has brought that to light, before I send him a new one. In his last he published my epitaph upon Tiney³: which, I likewise imagine, has been long in your collection. . . .

I have been crossing the channel in a balloon, ever since I read of that achievement by Blanchard. I have an insatiable thirst to know the philosophical reason, why his vehicle had like to have fallen into the sea, when, for aught that appears, the gas was not at all exhausted. Did not the extreme cold condense the inflammable air, and cause the globe to collapse? Tell me, and be my Apollo for ever!

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

CXXXVI. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 22, 1785.

When I received your account of the great celebrity of *John Gilpin*, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man,

¹ In the previous year.² Beginning "The poplars are felled."³ His hare, "Old Tiney, surliest of his kind."

and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy inquiring after me: but the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then have written it, my spirits sank, and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy¹; and he, that I have a competitor for fame, not less formidable, in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth, in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations: and unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause. I have produced many things, under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring. But if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable fungus, it is well, at least, that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see, or think I can see, that *Gilpin* may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached.

I hope that neither the master of St. Paul's or any other school, who may have commenced my admirer on John's account, will write to me for such a reason; yet a little while, and if they have laughed with me, their note will be changed, and perhaps they will revile me. *Tirocinium* is no friend of theirs, on the contrary, if it have the effect I wish it to have, it will prove much their enemy; for it gives no quarter to modern pedagogues, but finding them all alike guilty of supineness and neglect in the affair of morals, condemns them, both schoolmasters and heads of colleges, without distinction. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say, that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity. I ought to tell you that this remark has a reference to *John Gilpin*, otherwise having

¹ An actress whose profligacy had ruined a brilliant career.

been jumbled a little out of its place you might be at a loss for the explication.

Yours,

W. C.

CXXXVII.

TO JOHN UNWIN

June 12, 1785.

. . . John, once the Little, but now almost the Great, and promising to be altogether such in time, make yourself master of the Iliad and of the Odyssey as soon as you can, and then you will be master of two of the finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered. All languages of which I know anything are gibberish compared with Greek.

WM. C.

CXXXVIII.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Olney, May 20, 1786.

About three weeks since I met your sister Chester at Mr. Throckmorton's, and from her learned that you are at Blithfield, and in health. Upon the encouragement of this information it is that I write now; I should not otherwise have known with certainty where to find you, or have been equally free from the fear of unseasonable intrusion. May God be with you, my friend, and give you a just measure of submission to His will, the most effectual of all remedies for the evils of this changing scene. I doubt not that He has granted you this blessing already, and may He still continue it!

Now I will talk a little about myself: for except myself, living in this *terrarium angulo*, what can I have to talk about? In a scene of perfect tranquillity, and the profoundest silence, I am kicking up the dust of heroic narrative, and besieging Troy again. I told you that I had almost finished the translation of the Iliad, and I verily thought so;—but I was never more mistaken. By the time when I had reached the end of the poem, the first book of my version was a twelvemonth old. When I came to consider it, after having laid it by so long, it did not satisfy me. I set myself to mend it, and I did so. But still it appeared to me improvable, and that nothing would so effectually secure that point as to give the whole book a new translation. With the exception of very few lines I have so done, and was never in my life so convinced of the soundness of Horace's advice to publish nothing in haste; so much advantage have I derived

from doing that twice which I thought I had accomplished notably at once. He indeed recommends nine years' imprisonment of your verses before you send them abroad: but the ninth part of that time is I believe as much as there is need of to open a man's eyes upon his own defects, and to secure him from the danger of premature self-approbation. Neither ought it to be forgotten that nine years make so wide an interval between the cup and the lip, that a thousand things may fall out between. New engagements may occur, which may make the finishing of that which a poet has begun impossible. In nine years he may rise into a situation, or he may sink into one utterly incompatible with his purpose. His constitution may break in nine years, and sickness may disqualify him for improving what he enterprised in the days of health. His inclination may change, and he may find some other employment more agreeable, or another poet may enter upon the same work, and get the start of him. Therefore, my friend Horace, though I acknowledge your principle to be good, I must confess that I think the practice you would ground upon it carried to an extreme. The rigour that I exercised upon the first book, I intend to exercise upon all that follow, and have now actually advanced into the middle of the seventh, no where admitting more than one line in fifty of the first translation. You must not imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth I had not: but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed if it does not call aloud for a second. You saw the specimen, and you saw, I am sure, one great fault in it: I mean the harshness of some of the elisions. I do not altogether take the blame of these to myself, for into some of them I was actually driven and hunted by a series of reiterated objections made by a critical friend, whose scruples and delicacies teased me out of all my patience. But no such monsters will be found in the volume . . .

Ever yours,

W. C.

P.S. The swan is called *argutus* (I suppose) *a non arguendo*, and *canorus a non canendo*. But whether he be dumb or vocal, more poetical than the eagle or less, it is no matter. A feather of either, in token of your approbation and esteem, will never, you may rest assured, be an offence to me.

CXXXIX.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, Oct. 6, 1786.

You have not heard, I suppose, that the ninth book of my translation is at the bottom of the Thames. But it is even so. A storm overtook it in its way to Kingston, and it sunk, together with the whole cargo of the boat in which it was a passenger;—not figuratively foreshowing, I hope, by its submersion, the fate of all the rest. My kind and generous cousin, who leaves nothing undone that she thinks can conduce to my comfort, encouragement, or convenience, is my transcriber also. *She* wrote the copy, and *she* will have to write it again—*Hers* therefore is the damage. I have a thousand reasons to lament that the time approaches when we must lose her. She has made a winterly summer a most delightful one, but the winter itself we must spend without her.

W. C.

CXL.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb 1, 1788

. . . What I said concerning Homer, my dear, was spoken, or rather written, merely under the influence of a certain jocularly that I felt at that moment. I am in reality so far from thinking myself an ass, and my translation a sand-cart, that I rather seem, in my own account of the matter, one of those flaming steeds harnessed to the chariot of Apollo, of which we read in the works of the ancients. I have lately, I know not how, acquired a certain superiority to myself in this business, and in this last revisal have elevated the expression to a degree far surpassing its former boast. A few evenings since I had an opportunity to try how far I might venture to expect such success of my labours as can alone repay them, by reading the first book of my *Iliad* to a friend of ours. He dined with you once at Olney. His name is Greatheed, a man of letters and of taste. He dined with us, and the evening proving dark and dirty, we persuaded him to take a bed. I entertained him as I tell you. He heard me with great attention, and with evident symptoms of the highest satisfaction, which, when I had finished the exhibition, he put out of all doubt by expressions which I cannot repeat. Only this he said to Mrs. Unwin while I was in another room, that he had never entered into the spirit of Homer before, nor had anything like a due conception

of his manner. This I have said, knowing that it will please you, and will now say no more.

Adieu!—my dear, will you never speak of coming to Weston more?

W. C.

CXLI.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 24, 1788.

For two excellent prints I return you my sincere acknowledgments. I cannot say that poor Kate resembles much the original, who was neither so young nor so handsome as the pencil has represented her; but she was a figure well suited to the account given of her in *The Task*, and has a face exceedingly expressive of despairing melancholy.¹ The lace-maker is accidentally a good likeness of a young woman, once our neighbour, who was hardly less handsome than the picture twenty years ago; but the loss of one husband, and the acquisition of another, have since that time impaired her much; yet she might still be supposed to have sat to the artist.

We dined yesterday with your friend and mine, the most companionable and domestic Mr. C——. The whole kingdom can hardly furnish a spectacle more pleasing to a man who has a taste for true happiness, than himself, Mrs. C——, and their multitudinous family. Seven long miles are interposed between us, or perhaps I should oftener have an opportunity of declaiming on this subject.

I am now in the nineteenth book of the Iliad, and on the point of displaying such feats of heroism performed by Achilles, as make all other achievements trivial. I may well exclaim, O! for a muse of fire! especially having not only a great host to cope with, but a great river also; much, however, may be done, when Homer leads the way. I should not have chosen to have been the original author of such a business, even though all the nine had stood at my elbow. Time has wonderful effects. We admire that in an ancient, for which we should send a modern bard to Bedlam.

I saw at Mr. C——'s a great curiosity; an antique bust of Paris in Parian marble. You will conclude that it interested me exceedingly. I pleased myself with supposing that it once stood

¹ A serving-maid was she, and fell in love
With one who left her, went to sea and died.

in Helen's chamber. It was in fact brought from the Levant, and though not well mended (for it had suffered much by time) is an admirable performance.

W. C.

CXLII.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

The Lodge, May 20, 1789.

Finding myself, between twelve and one, at the end of the seventeenth book of the *Odyssey*, I give the interval between the present moment and the time of walking to you. If I write letters before I sit down to Homer, I feel my spirits too flat for poetry; and too flat for letter-writing, if I address myself to Homer first; but the last I choose as the least evil, because my friends will pardon my dulness, but the public will not. . . .

Nothing is more certain, than that when I wrote the line,

God made the country, and man made the town,¹

I had not the least recollection of that very similar one, which you quote from Hawkins Browne.² It convinces me that critics, (and none more than Warton, in his notes on Milton's minor poems,) have often charged authors with borrowing what they drew from their own fund. Browne was an entertaining companion when he had drunk his bottle, but not before; this proved a snare to him, and he would sometimes drink too much; but I know not that he was chargeable with any other irregularities. He had those among his intimates who would not have been such had he been otherwise viciously inclined;—the Duncombes, in particular, father and son, who were of unblemished morals.

W. C.

CXLIII.

TO MRS. KING

MY DEAR MADAM,

March 12, 1700.

. . . I have lately received from a female cousin of mine in Norfolk, whom I have not seen these thirty years, a picture of my own mother. She died when I wanted two days of being

¹ *The Task*, I. 749

² A well-known writer who had died in 1760. Cowper refers elsewhere to the "witty and elegant Hawkins Browne," and to his poem in the praise of tobacco (see Letter No. CLXX., p. 183).

six years old; yet I remember her perfectly, find the picture a strong likeness of her, and because her memory has been ever precious to me, have written a poem on the receipt of it: a poem which, one excepted, I had more pleasure in writing than any that I ever wrote. That one was addressed to a lady¹ whom I expect in a few minutes to come down to breakfast, and who has supplied to me the place of my own mother—my own invaluable mother, these six-and-twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers, but a plurality of mothers is not common.

Adieu, my dear Madam; be assured that I always think of you with much esteem and affection, and am, with mine and Mrs. Unwin's best compliments to you and yours, most unfeignedly your friend and humble servant,

W. C.

CXLIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, May 18, 1791.

Has another of thy letters fallen short of its destination; or wherefore is it, that thou writest not? One letter in five weeks is a poor allowance for your friends at Weston. One that I received two or three days since from Mrs. Frog, has not at all enlightened me on this head. But I wander in a wilderness of vain conjecture.

I have had a letter lately from New York, from a Dr. Cogswell of that place, to thank me for my fine verses, and to tell me, which pleased me particularly, that after having read *The Task*, my first volume fell into his hands, which he read also, and was equally pleased with. This is the only instance I can recollect of a reader who has done justice to my first effusions: for I am sure, that in point of expression they do not fall a jot below my second, and that in point of subject they are for the most part superior. But enough, and too much of this. *The Task* he tells me has been reprinted in that city.

Adieu! my dearest coz.

We have blooming scenes under wintry skies, and with icy blasts to fan them.

Ever thine,

W. C.

¹ The sonnet recently composed to Mary beginning:

"Mary! I want a lyre with other strings."

CXLV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, Aug. 30, 1791.

. . . The Chancellor and I, my dear, have had a correspondence on the subject of Homer. He had doubts, it seems, about the propriety of translating him in blank verse, and wrote to Henry¹ to tell him so, adding a translation of his own in rhyme of the speech of Achilles to Phœnix, in the ninth book; and referring him to me, who, he said, could elevate it, and polish it, and give it the tone of Homer. Henry sent this letter to me, and I answered it in one to his lordship, but not meddling with his verses, for I remembered what happened between Gil Blas and the Archbishop of Toledo.² His lordship sent me two sheets in reply, filled with arguments in favour of rhyme, which I was to answer if I could; and containing another translation of the same passage, only in blank verse, leaving it to me to give it rhyme, to make it close, and faithful, and poetical. All this I performed as best I could, and yesterday I heard from him again. In this last letter he says:—"I am clearly convinced that Homer may be best translated *without* rhyme, and that you have succeeded in the passages I have looked into."

Such is the candour of a wise man and a real scholar. I would to Heaven that all prejudiced persons were like him!—I answered this letter immediately; and here, I suppose, our correspondence ends. Have I not made a great convert? You shall see the letters, both his and mine, when you come. . . .

Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well,—that is, much as usual. She joins me in best love, and in every thing that you can wish us both to feel for you.

Adieu, my dearest coz.

Ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

CXLVI.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

Weston, Jan. 5, 1794.

. . . Imlac, in *Rasselas*, says—I forget to whom—"You have convinced me that it is impossible to be a poet."³ In like manner I might say to his lordship, you have convinced me that it is

¹ Henry Cowper, a cousin.

² See Letter No. CXLVII.

³ "Enough," said *Rasselas*, "thou hast convinced me that no human being can ever be a poet" (Johnson's *Rasselas*). Cowper, like Goldsmith, frequently misquotes: the words were addressed to Imlac.

impossible to be a translator; to be a translator, on his terms at least, is, I am sure, impossible. On his terms I would defy Homer himself, were he alive, to translate the *Paradise Lost* into Greek. Yet Milton had Homer much in his eye when he composed that poem. Whereas Homer never thought of me or my translation. There are *minutiæ* in every language, which transfused into another will spoil the version. Such extreme fidelity is in fact unfaithful; such close resemblance takes away all likeness. The original is elegant, easy, natural; the copy is clumsy, constrained, unnatural. To what is this owing? To the adoption of terms not congenial to your purpose, and of a context such as no man writing an original work would make use of. Homer is everything that a poet should be. A translation of Homer so made, will be everything that a translation of Homer should not be: because it will be written in no language under heaven:—it will be English, and it will be Greek; and therefore it will be neither. He is the man, whoever he be,—(I do not pretend to be that man myself:) he is the man best qualified as a translator of Homer, who has drenched, and steeped, and soaked himself in the effusions of his genius, till he has imbibed their colour to the bone, and who, when he is thus dyed through and through, distinguishing between what is essentially Greek, and what may be habited in English, rejects the former, and is faithful to the latter, as far as the purposes of fine poetry will permit, and no further: this, I think, may be easily proved. Homer is everywhere remarkable either for ease, dignity, or energy of expression; for grandeur of conception, and a majestic flow of numbers. If we copy him so closely as to make every one of these excellent properties of his absolutely unattainable, which will certainly be the effect of too close a copy, instead of translating we murder him. Therefore, after all that his lordship has said, I still hold freedom to be an indispensable. Freedom, I mean, with respect to the expression; freedom so limited, as never to leave behind the *matter*; but at the same time indulged with a sufficient scope to secure the spirit, and as much as possible of the manner. I say as much as possible, because an English manner must differ from a Greek one, in order to be graceful, and for this there is no remedy. Can an ungraceful, awkward translation of Homer be a good one? No. But a graceful, easy, natural, faithful version of him, will not that be a good one? Yes. Allow me but this, and I insist upon it, that such a one may be produced on my principles, and can be produced on no other.

I have not had time to criticise his lordship's other version. You know how little time I have for anything, and can tell him so.

Adieu! my dear brother. I have now tired both you and myself; and with the love of the whole trio, remain,

Yours ever,

W. C.

Reading his lordship's sentiments over again, I am inclined to think that in all I have said, I have only given him back the same in other terms. He disallows both the absolute *free*, and the absolute *close*;—so do I; and, if I understand myself, have said so in my Preface. He wishes to recommend a medium, though he will not call it so; so do I: only we express it differently. What is it then we dispute about? My head is not good enough to-day to discover.

III. GROWING FAME AS A POET

(LETTERS CXLVII.-CLV.)

Cowper's first volume met with a mixed reception. Whilst some of the reviews, like the *London Magazine*, the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Monthly Review*, were more or less favourable, the powerful *Critical Review* described him as "travelling on a plain level, flat road, with great composure, almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon, in very indifferent verse." Cowper was particularly gratified by the warm praise of Benjamin Franklin, and he recorded with some satisfaction that "Doctor Johnson read, and recommended, my first volume."

With the appearance of *The Task* the numbers of his admirers increased enormously, the reading public was beginning to return with the poet to nature from the hard glitter and wearisome round of town-life, as depicted by the Augustans. Nor was his fame confined to his own country; we read that *The Task* was very popular in New York and that "sixty different persons at The Hague are all enchanted with it." Even Mr Cox, the Northampton parish-clerk, was no longer satisfied with the local bard—Cowper must write the mortuary verses for his church! Official recognition of his genius came in 1788, when he was offered the poet laureateship (an honour which he declined), and again, in 1794, when a state pension of £300 a year was granted to him—too late, unfortunately, to be of much material advantage to the shattered invalid.

CXLVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 27, 1782.

Rather ashamed of having been at all dejected by the censure of the Critical Reviewers, who certainly could not read without prejudice a book replete with opinions and doctrines to which they cannot subscribe. I have at present no little occasion to keep a strict guard upon my vanity, lest it should be too much flattered by the following eulogium: I send it you for the reasons I gave when I imparted to you some other anecdotes of a similar kind, while we were together. Our interests in the success of this same volume are so closely united, that you *must* share with me in the praise or blame that attends it; and sympathising with me under the burden of injurious treatment, have a right to enjoy with me the cordials I now and then receive, as I happen to meet with more favourable and candid judges.

A merchant, a friend of ours, (you will soon guess him,) sent my Poems to one of the first philosophers, one of the most

eminent literary characters, as well as one of the most important in the political world, that the present age can boast of. Now perhaps your conjecturing faculties are puzzled, and you begin to ask, "who, where, and what is he? speak out, for I am all impatience." I will not say a word more, the letter in which he returned his thanks for the present shall speak for him.

"SIR,

Passy, May 8, 1782

"I received the letter you did me the honour of writing to me, and am much obliged by your kind present of a book. The relish for reading of poetry had long since left me, but there is something so new in the manner, so easy, and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiments, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once. I beg you to accept my thankful acknowledgments, and to present my respects to the author.

"I shall take care to forward the letters to America, and shall be glad of any other opportunity of doing what may be agreeable to you, being with great respect for your character,

"Your most obedient humble servant,

"B. FRANKLIN."

We may now treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, "Begone for a jackanapes, and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it." . . .

Yours,

W. C.

CXLVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 12, 1782

Every extraordinary occurrence in our lives affords us an opportunity to learn, if we will, something more of our own hearts and tempers than we were before aware of. It is easy to promise ourselves beforehand, that our conduct shall be wise, or moderate, or resolute, on any given occasion. But when that occasion occurs, we do not always find it easy to make good the promise: such a difference there is between theory and practice. Perhaps this is no new remark; but it is not a whit the worse for being old, if it be true.

Before I had published, I said to myself—You and I, Mr.

Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book. But having once sent my wits for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased, but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias: methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the *London Magazine*, and the *Gentleman's*, particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not allow them. But the *Monthly Review*, the most formidable of all my judges, is still behind. What will that critical Rhadamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait another month for his award. Alas! when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter, (to confess a weakness that I should not confess to all,) I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present perhaps think me one. Here is a carpenter, and a baker, and not to mention others, here is your idol Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the *Monthly Review*, and all these will set me down for a dunce, if those terrible critics show them the example. But oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffith, let me pass for a genius at Olney! . . .

Your sister is well, and joins with me and your mother in affectionate remembrance of all at Stock.

We send you a cheer,
In hopes it will please
If so, your mother
Will send you another

Yours,
W. C.

CXLIX.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Jan. 3, 1787.

. . . I have not the good fortune to meet with any of these fine things, that you say are printed in my praise. But I learn

from certain advertisements in the *Morning Herald*, that I make a conspicuous figure in the entertainments of Freemasons' Hall. I learn also that my volumes are out of print, and that a third edition is soon to be published. But if I am not gratified with the sight of odes composed to my honour and glory, I have at least been tickled with some *douceurs* of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the best of men;—an unknown gentleman has read my inimitable poems, and invites me to his seat in Hampshire;—another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden, and a Welsh attorney¹ sends me his verses to revise, and obliging asks:

Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale?

If you find me a little vain hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater.

Mrs. Unwin is as much delighted as myself with our present situation. But it is a sort of April-weather life that we lead in this world. A little sunshine is generally the prelude to a storm. Hardly had we begun to enjoy the change, when the death of her son cast a gloom upon everything. He was a most exemplary man; of your order; learned, polite, and amiable. The father of lovely children, and the husband of a wife (very much like dear Mrs. Bagot) who adored him.

Adieu, my friend! Your affectionate

W. C.

CL.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Nov. 27, 1787.

. . . On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows: "Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All Saints, in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You would do me a great favour, Sir, if you would furnish me with one." To this I replied, "Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have

¹ Probably Mr. William Churchey of Brecon.

you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox the statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose." "Alas! Sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading, that the people of our town cannot understand him." I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my Muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one*, that serves *two hundred* persons. . . .

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about some time with the spoon, and then returned it to her, saying, "I am a poor man it is true, and I am very hungry, but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it." Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.

Yours ever,

W. C.

CLI.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, July 28, 1788.

. . . Have you seen the account of Five hundred celebrated authors now living? I am one of them; but stand charged with the high crime and misdemeanour of totally neglecting method; an accusation which, if the gentleman would take the pains to read me, he would find sufficiently refuted. I am conscious at least myself of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of my book of *The Task*, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connexion which poetry demands; for in poetry, (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous. But there is no pleasing some critics; the comfort is, that I am contented, whether they be pleased or not. At the same time, to my honour be it spoken,

the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them! Amen!

I join with you, my dearest coz, in wishing that I owned the fee simple of all the beautiful scenes around you, but such emoluments were never designed for poets. Am I not happier than ever poet was, in having thee for my cousin, and in the expectation of thy arrival here whenever Strawberry Hill shall lose thee?

Ever thine,

W.C.

CLII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, August 9, 1788.

The Newtons are still here, and continue with us I believe until the fifteenth of the month. Here is also my friend, Mr. Rose, a valuable young man, who, attracted by the effluvia of my genius, found me out in my retirement last January twelvemonth. I have not permitted him to be idle, but have made him transcribe for me the twelfth book of the Iliad. He brings me the compliments of several of the *literati*, with whom he is acquainted in town, and tells me, that from Dr. Maclaine, whom he saw lately, he learns that my book is in the hands of sixty different persons at The Hague, who are all enchanted with it, not forgetting the said Dr. Maclaine himself, who tells him that he reads it every day, and is always the better for it. O rare we!

I have been employed this morning in composing a Latin motto for the king's clock; the embellishments of which are by Mr. Bacon. That gentleman breakfasted with us on Wednesday, having come thirty-seven miles out of his way on purpose to see your cousin. At his request I have done it, and have made two: he will choose that which liketh him best. Mr. Bacon¹ is a most excellent man, and a most agreeable companion: I would that he lived not so remote, or that he had more opportunity of travelling.

There is not, so far as I know, a syllable of the rhyming correspondence² between me and my poor brother left, save

¹ The sculptor who is celebrated in *The Task*, I. 702-4:

"Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips."

² A rhyming letter to Newton is given later (see Letter No. ccxcvii.).

and except the six lines of it quoted in yours. I *had* the whole of it, but it perished in the wreck of a thousand other things, when I left the Temple.

Breakfast calls. Adieu!

W. C.

CLIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, May 28, 1790.

I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath¹ you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, wouldst least wish me to wear it.

Adieu, ever thine — in Homer-hurry,

W. C.

CLIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, June 3, 1790

You will wonder when I tell you that I, even I, am considered by people, who live at a great distance, as having interest and influence sufficient to procure a place at court for those who may happen to want one. I have accordingly been applied to within these few days by a Welshman,² with a wife and many children, to get him made poet-laureat as fast as possible. If thou wouldst wish to make the world merry twice a year, thou canst not do better than procure the office³ for him. I will promise thee, that he shall afford thee a hearty laugh in return every birthday, and every new year. He is an honest man.

Adieu!

W. C.

CLV.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ

Weston, Oct 5, 1793

My good intentions towards you, my dearest brother, are continually frustrated, and which is most provoking, not by such engagements and avocations as have a right to my attention,

¹ The poet-laureateship

² Probably Churchey.

³ After its refusal by Cowper and Hayley, it was given to Pyc, whom Byron ridiculed in his *Vision of Judgment*.

such as those to my Mary, and to the old bard of Greece, but by mere impertinencies, such as calls of civility from persons not very interesting to me, and letters from a distance still less interesting, because the writers of them are strangers. A man sent me a long copy of verses, which I could do no less than acknowledge. They were silly enough, and cost me eighteenpence, which was seventeenpence-halfpenny-farthing more than they were worth. Another sent me at the same time a plan, requesting my opinion of it, and that I would lend him my name as editor; a request with which I shall not comply, but I am obliged to tell him so, and one letter is all that I have time to dispatch in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes I am not able to write at all. Thus it is that my time perishes, and I can neither give so much of it as I would to you or to any other valuable purpose. . . .

W. C.

IV. HIS CHARACTER

(LETTERS CLVI.—CLXVIII.)

"Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the Fall"

So Cowper wrote in the third book of *The Task* (lines 42-3), and it is this love of home and delight in retirement which is one of the distinguishing traits in his character and which is continually emphasised in his poetry and prose. the picture of the winter evening beginning

"Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast"—

The Task, IV. 36—

will for ever endear him to the home-loving Englishman. He loved Olney, despite its discomforts, and regretfully quoted On the Side for Weston Lodge. "Like the man in the fable who could leap no where but at Rhodes," Cowper felt unable to write during his visit to Earham: "I am so unaccountably local in the use of my pen."

With this love of retirement went a shy, retiring disposition; he wrote of himself in one of his early poems—

"William was once a bashful youth."

and he lamented that "an insuperable shyness has deprived him of many [friends]"; but the barriers of reserve once down, he delighted in "this mutual intercourse that . . . proves us to be creatures intended for social life." We have already had abundant evidence that he was naturally cheerful: "When I am in the best health my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality"; until the gloom of melancholy settled upon him he was the happiest of men.

We shall refer elsewhere to his love of animals and his championship of the oppressed; we have already noted his deep affection for his mother and his devotion to Mary Unwin. Hardly less intense was his love for his country in days when it was considered unfashionable to make public confession of such fine feelings:

"But I can feel thy fortunes and partake
Thy joys and sorrows with as true a heart
As any thunderer there"

CLVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 27, 1783.

You cannot have more pleasure in receiving a letter from me, than I should find in writing it, were it not almost impossible in such a place to find a subject.

I live in a world abounding with incidents, upon which many grave, and perhaps some profitable observations might be made; but those incidents never reaching my unfortunate ears, both the entertaining narrative and the reflection it might suggest

are to me annihilated and lost. I look back to the past week, and say, what did it produce? I ask the same question of the week preceding, and duly receive the same answer from both,—nothing!—A situation like this, in which I am as unknown to the world, as I am ignorant of all that passes in it, in which I have nothing to do but to think, would exactly suit me, were my subjects of meditation as agreeable as my leisure is uninterrupted. My passion for retirement is not at all abated, after so many years spent in the most sequestered state, but rather increased¹;—a circumstance I should esteem wonderful to a degree not to be accounted for, considering the condition of my mind, did I not know, that we think as we are made to think, and of course approve and prefer, as Providence, who appoints the bounds of our habitation, chooses for us. Thus am I both free and a prisoner at the same time. The world is before me; I am not shut up in the Bastille; there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates, of which I have not the key;—but an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more forcible than I ever felt, even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness of those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection. But it is otherwise with me now. The same cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded that were it possible I could leave this incommensurable nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is, and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of *Him* that placed me in it.—

*Iste terrarum mihi præter omnes
Angulus ridet.*

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any

¹ Enamoured of sequestered scenes
And charmed with rural beauty.

The Task, III. 27–8.

happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself and with the least disturbance to others. . . .

W. C.

CLVII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Oct. 20, 1783.

I should not have been thus long silent, had I known with certainty where a letter of mine might find you. Your summer excursions, however, are now at an end, and addressing a line to you in the centre of the busy scene in which you spend your winter, I am pretty sure of my mark.

I see the winter approaching without much concern, though a passionate lover of fine weather and the pleasant scenes of summer; but the long evenings have their comforts too, and there is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature as an Englishman by his fireside in the winter.¹ I mean however an Englishman that lives in the country, for in London it is not very easy to avoid intrusion. I have two ladies to read to, sometimes more, but never less. At present we are circumnavigating the globe, and I find the old story with which I amused myself some years since, through the great felicity of a memory not very retentive, almost new. I am however sadly at a loss for Cook's voyage, can you send it? I shall be glad of Foster's² too. These together will make the winter pass merrily, and you will much oblige me.

W. C.

CLVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Eartham, Sept 9, 1792.

I determine, if possible, to send you one more letter, or at least, if possible, once more to send you something like one, before we leave Eartham. But I am in truth so unaccountably local in the use of my pen, that, like the man in the fable, who could leap well nowhere but at Rhodes, I seem incapable of writing at all, except at Weston. This is, as I have already told you, a delightful place; more beautiful scenery I have never beheld nor expect to behold; but the charms of it, uncommon as they are, have not in the least alienated my affections from

¹

But me perhaps
The glowing hearth may satisfy a while
The Task, IV. 272-3

² The botanist who accompanied Cook on his second voyage (1772-5)

Weston. The genius of that place suits me better,—it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels itself peculiarly gratified; whereas here I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains,—a wilderness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little. Accordingly, I have not looked out for a house in Sussex, nor shall. . . .

W. C.

CLIX.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 7, 1782

At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the teapot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the teacup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream; limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this situation; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine! —yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies ¹ has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, ² have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the meantime, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathise with our friends who can.

¹ Mrs. Unwin.

² Lady Austen.

The papers tell me that peace is at hand, and that it is at a great distance; that the siege of Gibraltar¹ is abandoned, and that it is to be still continued. It is happy for me, that though I love my country, I have but little curiosity. There was a time when these contradictions would have distressed me, but I have learnt by experience that it is best for little people like myself to be patient, and to wait till time affords the intelligence which no speculations of theirs can ever furnish.

I thank you for a fine cod with oysters, and hope that ere long I shall have to thank you for procuring me Elliott's medicines. Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble lest, my Æsculapius being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever. Adieu. My respects to Mrs. Hill.

Yours faithfully,

WM. COWPER.

CLX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 19, 1784.

. . . I converse, you say, upon other subjects, than that of despair, and may therefore write upon others. Indeed, my friend, I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so; always, indeed, when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start any thing myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind, make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good-natured raillery; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it. But you will easily perceive that a mind thus occupied is but indifferently qualified for the consideration of theological matters. The most useful and the most delightful topics of that kind are to me forbidden fruit;—I tremble if I approach them. It has happened to me sometimes that I have found myself imperceptibly drawn in, and made a party in such discourse. The consequence has been, dissatisfaction and self-reproach. You will tell me, perhaps, that I have written upon these subjects in verse, and may,

¹ Begun in July 1779 and continued till January 1783.

therefore, if I please, in prose. But there is a difference. The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty; they amuse, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none. There are, however, subjects that do not always terrify me by their importance; such, I mean, as relate to Christian life and manners; and when such an one presents itself, and finds me in a frame of mind that does not absolutely forbid the employment, I shall most readily give it my attention, for the sake, however, of your request merely. Verse is my favourite occupation, and what I compose in that way, I reserve for my own use hereafter.

My evenings are devoted to books. I read aloud¹ for the entertainment of the party, thus making amends by a vociferation of two hours for my silence at other times. . . .

Yours, my dear friends, truly,

WM. C.

CLXI.

TO THE REV. MATTHEW POWLEY²

DEAR SIR,

[About 1786.]

You judge wisely, I believe; it is certainly best that we should cease to discuss a matter which neither you nor I are qualified to adjust. It is very possible that I might misstate a circumstance which happened so long ago as last March twelvemonth, for I keep no letters, except such as are recommended for preservation by the importance of their contents, and consequently had none to refer to. By *important contents*, I mean what is commonly called *business* of some sort or other. In the destruction of all other epistles I consult the good of my friends; for I account it a point of delicacy not to leave behind me, when I die, such bundles of their communications as I otherwise should, for the inspection of I know not whom; and as I deal with theirs, for the very same reason, I most heartily wish them all to deal with mine. In fact, there seems to be no more reason for perpetuating or preserving what passes the pen in the course of a common correspondence, than what passes the lips in every

¹ This folio of four pages, happy work
Which not even critics criticise, that holds
Inquisitive attention while I read.

The Task, IV. 50-2.

² Mrs. Unwin's son-in-law.

day's conversation. A thousand folios of the latter are forgotten without any regret; and octavos, at least, of the former are frequently treasured till death, for no use whatever either to ourselves or others. They then, perhaps, go to the grocer's, and serve to amuse such of his customers as can read *written hand*, as they call it; or now and then, which is fifty times worse, they find their way to the press; a misfortune which never, at least seldom, fails to happen, if the deceased has been so unfortunate as to leave behind him a friend more affectionate to his memory than discreet in his choice of means to honour it. . . .

Mrs. U. unites with me in love to you both, and I remain, sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

CLXII.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

Weston, July 31, 1790.

You have by this time, I presume, answered Lady Hesketh's letter. If not, answer it without delay, and this injunction I give you, judging that it may not be entirely unnecessary; for though I have seen you but once, and only for two or three days, I have found out that you are a scatter-brain. I made the discovery perhaps the sooner, because in this you very much resemble myself, who in the course of my life have, through mere carelessness and inattention, lost many advantages; an insuperable shyness has also deprived me of many. And here again there is a resemblance between us. You will do well to guard against both, for of both, I believe, you have a considerable share as well as myself.

We long to see you again, and are only concerned at the short stay you propose to make with us. If time should seem to you as short at Weston, as it seems to us, your visit here will be gone "as a dream when one awaketh, or as a watch in the night."

It is a life of dreams, but the pleasantest one naturally wishes longest.

I shall find employment for you, having made already some part of the fair copy of the *Odyssey* a foul one. I am revising it for the last time, and spare nothing that I can mend. The *Iliad* is finished.

If you have Donne's poems, bring them with you, for I have not seen them many years, and should like to look them over.

You may treat us too, if you please, with a little of your music, for I seldom hear any, and delight much in it. You need not

fear a rival, for we have but two fiddles in the neighbourhood,—one a gardener's, the other a tailor's: terrible performers both!

W. C.

CLXIII.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Aug. 2, 1791.

I was much obliged, and still feel myself much obliged to Lady Bagot, for the visit with which she favoured me. Had it been possible that I could have seen Lord Bagot too, I should have been completely happy. For, as it happened, I was that morning in better spirits than usual; and though I arrived late, and after a long walk, and extremely hot, which is a circumstance very apt to disconcert me, yet I was not disconcerted half so much as I generally am at the sight of a stranger, especially of a stranger lady, and more especially at the sight of a stranger lady of quality. When the servant told me that Lady Bagot was in the parlour, I felt my spirits sink ten degrees; but the moment I saw her, at least when I had been a minute in her company, I felt them rise again, and they soon rose even above their former pitch. I know two ladies of fashion now, whose manners have this effect upon me. The Lady in question, and the Lady Spencer. I am a shy animal, and want much kindness to make me easy. Such I shall be to my dying day.

Here sit I, calling myself *shy*, yet have just published by the by, two great volumes of *poetry*.

This reminds me of Ranger's observation in the *Suspicious Husband*, who says to somebody, I forget whom—"There is a degree of assurance in you modest men, that we impudent fellows can never arrive at!"—Assurance indeed! Have you seen 'em? What do you think they are? Nothing less I can tell you than a translation of Homer. Of the sublimest poet in the world. That's all. Can I ever have the impudence to call myself shy again?

You live, I think, in the neighbourhood of Birmingham? What must you not have felt on the late alarming occasion! You I suppose could see the fires from your windows. We, who only heard the news of them, have trembled. Never sure was religious zeal more terribly manifested, or more to the prejudice of its own cause.

Adieu, my dear friend. I am, with Mrs. Unwin's best compliments,

Ever yours,

W. C.

CLXIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 26, 1781.

I wrote to you by the last post, supposing you at Stock; but lest that letter should not follow you to Laytonstone, and you should suspect me of unreasonable delay, and lest the frank you have sent me should degenerate into waste paper, and perish upon my hands, I write again. The former letter, however, containing all my present stock of intelligence, it is more than possible that this may prove a blank, or but little worthy of your acceptance. You will do me the justice to suppose, that if I could be very entertaining, I would be so, because, by giving me credit for such a willingness to please, you only allow me a share of that universal vanity, which inclines every man, upon all occasions, to exhibit himself to the best advantage. To say the truth, however, when I write, as I do to you, not about business, nor on any subject that approaches to that description, I mean much less my correspondent's amusement, which my modesty will not always permit me to hope for, than my own. There is a pleasure annexed to the communication of one's ideas, whether by word of mouth, or by letter, which nothing earthly can supply the place of, and it is the delight we find in this mutual intercourse, that not only proves us to be creatures intended for social life, but more than anything else perhaps fits us for it.—I have no patience with philosophers;—they, one and all, suppose (at least I understand it to be a prevailing opinion among them) that man's weakness, his necessities, his inability to stand alone, have furnished the prevailing motive, under the influence of which he renounced at first a life of solitude, and became a gregarious creature. It seems to me more reasonable, as well as more honourable to my species, to suppose, that generosity of soul, and a brotherly attachment to our own kind, drew us, as it were, to one common centre, taught us to build cities, and inhabit them, and welcome every stranger, that would cast in his lot amongst us, that we might enjoy fellowship with each other, and the luxury of reciprocal endearments, without which a paradise could afford no comfort. There are indeed all sorts of characters in the world; there are some whose understandings are so sluggish, and whose hearts are such mere clods, that they live in society without either contributing to the sweets of it, or having any relish for them.—A man of this stamp passes by our window continually; he draws patterns for the lace-makers; I never saw him conversing with

a neighbour but once in my life, though I have known him by sight these twelve years; he is of a very sturdy make, has a round belly, extremely protuberant, which he evidently considers as his best friend, because it is his only companion, and it is the labour of his life to fill it. I can easily conceive, that it is merely the love of good eating and drinking, and now and then the want of a new pair of shoes, that attaches this man so much to the neighbourhood of his fellow mortals; for suppose these exigencies, and others of a like kind, to subsist no longer, and what is there that could possibly give society the preference in his esteem? He might strut about with his two thumbs upon his hips in a wilderness; he could hardly be more silent than he is at Olney, and for any advantage, or comfort, or friendship, or brotherly affection, he could not be more destitute of such blessings there, than in his present situation. But other men have something more than guts to satisfy; there are the yearnings of the heart, which, let philosophers say what they will, are more importunate than all the necessities of the body, that will not suffer a creature, worthy to be called human, to be content with an insulated life, or to look for his friends among the beasts of the forest. Yourself for instance! It is not because there are no tailors or pastry-cooks to be found upon Salisbury Plain, that you do not choose it for your abode, but because you are a philanthropist,—because you are susceptible of social impressions, and have a pleasure in doing a kindness when you can.—Witness the salmon you sent, and the salmon you still mean to send; to which your mother wishes you to add a handful of prawns, not only because she likes them, but because they agree with her so well that she even finds them medicinal.

CLXV.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 25, 1786.

. . . Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible that these fine nerves of mine shall not be beyond measure agitated when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect, of the most advantageous kind upon them. You must not imagine neither, that I am on the whole in any great

degree subject to nervous affections. Occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me;—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

Adieu, my beloved cousin! God grant that our friendship which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever!

For you must know that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom, in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be,

Yours for ever,

W. C.

CLXVI.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Huntingdon, April 3, 1767.

You sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with everything he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect at first that pride and vain glory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered in that fruitful soil the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is matter of speculation in the place, whence I came, and to whom I belong.

Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has since that time received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility*, yet I could not resist the opportunity of fur-

nishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears me called "*That fellow Cowper,*" which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh pride! pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about, to get from under the Cross, which is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good will. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger, and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper, will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But in good truth it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name. How should such a creature be admitted into those pure and sinless mansions, where nothing shall enter that defileth, did not the blood of Christ, applied by the hand of faith, take away the guilt of sin, and leave no spot or stain behind it? Oh what continual need have I of an Almighty, All-sufficient Saviour! . . .

W. C.

CLXVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 2, 1779.

. . . I would follow your advice, and endeavour to furnish Lord North¹ with a scheme of supplies for the ensuing year, if the difficulty I find in answering the call of my own emergencies did not make me despair of satisfying those of the nation. I can say but this; if I had ten acres of land in the world, whereas I have not one, and in those ten acres should discover a gold mine, richer than all Mexico and Peru, when I had reserved a few ounces for my own annual supply, I would willingly give the rest to government. My ambition would be more gratified by annihilating the national incumbrances, than by going daily down to the bottom of a mine, to wallow in my own emolument. This is patriotism, you will allow; but, alas, this virtue is for the most part in the hands of those who can do no good with it! He that has but a single handful of it, catches so greedily at the first opportunity of growing rich, that his patriotism drops to the ground, and he grasps the gold instead of it. He that never meets with such an opportunity, holds it

¹ Then Prime Minister.

fast in his clenched fists, and says,—“Oh, how much good I would do, if I could!”

Your mother says—“Pray send my dear love.” There is hardly room to add mine, but you will suppose it.

Yours,

W. C.

CLXVIII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Jan. 31, 1782.

Having thanked you for a barrel of very fine oysters, I should have nothing more to say, if I did not determine to say everything that may happen to occur. The political world affords us no very agreeable subjects at present, nor am I sufficiently conversant with it, to do justice to so magnificent a theme, if it did. A man that lives as I do, whose chief occupation, at this season of the year, is to walk ten times in a day from the fire-side to his cucumber-frame and back again, cannot show his wisdom more, if he has any wisdom to show, than by leaving the mysteries of government to the management of persons, in point of situation and information, much better qualified for the business. Suppose not, however, that I am perfectly an unconcerned spectator, or that I take no interest at all in the affairs of my country; far from it—I read the news—I see that things go wrong in every quarter. I meet, now and then, with an account of some disaster that seems to be the indisputable progeny of treachery, cowardice, or a spirit of faction; I recollect that in those happier days, when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject, without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought me the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal,¹ how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Conflans,² I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture, when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec.³ I am not, therefore, I suppose, destitute of true

¹ Victory over French fleet off Lagos, 1759

² The naval victory at Quiberon Bay a few months later

•

Praise enough

To fill the ambition of a private man

That Chatham's language was his mother-tongue

And Wolfe's great name compatriot with his own.

The Task, II. 235-8.

patriotism, but the course of public events has, of late, afforded me no opportunity to exert it. I cannot rejoice, because I see no reason, and I will not murmur, because for that I can find no good one.¹ And let me add, he that has seen both sides of fifty, has lived to little purpose, if he has not other views of the world than he had when he was much younger. He finds, if he reflects at all, that it will be to the end, what it has been from the beginning, a shifting, uncertain, fluctuating scene; that nations, as well as individuals, have their seasons of infancy, youth, and age. If he be an Englishman, he will observe that ours, in particular, is affected with every symptom of decay, and is already sunk into a state of decrepitude. I am reading Mrs. Macaulay's History. I am not quite such a superannuated simpleton, as to suppose that mankind were wiser or much better, when I was young, than they are now. But I may venture to assert, without exposing myself to the charge of dotage, that the men whose integrity, courage, and wisdom, broke the bands of tyranny, established our constitution upon its true basis, and gave a people, overwhelmed with the scorn of all countries, an opportunity to emerge into a state of the highest respect and estimation, make a better figure in history than any of the present day are likely to do, when their petty harangues are forgotten, and nothing shall survive but the remembrance of the views and motives with which they made them.

My dear friend, I have written at random, in every sense, neither knowing what sentiments I should broach, when I began, nor whether they would accord with yours. Excuse a rustic, if he errs on such a subject, and believe me sincerely yours,

W. COWPER.

¹ England, with all thy faults, I love thee still,
My country

The Task, II 206-7.

V. HIS FRIENDS AND CORRESPONDENTS

The opportunity is taken here of grouping together the most important of Cowper's correspondents and friends. The Unwins, Lady Hesketh and Lady Austen, having been discussed more fully elsewhere, are omitted; of Joseph Hill nothing more need be said than that he was an old school-friend who acted as Cowper's financial adviser, whilst Major (later General) Cowper and his wife, Mrs. Frances Cowper, were first cousins of the poet. We begin with

I. THE REVEREND JOHN NEWTON

(LETTERS CLXIX.—CLXXIII.)

The converted slave-trader and Evangelical curate of Olney, whose "eternal praying and preaching" are alleged by many to have had such a deleterious influence upon Cowper, who aided him in much of his parochial work. It is questionable whether this influence was half as pernicious as that of schoolmaster Teedon, to whom we shall refer later. One of the chief causes of the prejudice against Newton was the letter to which No. CLXXII. is an answer, we have to remember, however, that he did not approve of Cowper's intimacy with the Throckmorthons, and village scandal had led him to believe that his friend had turned Papist. That the poet bore him no ill will is evident from their correspondence, which continued, without serious interruption, until the end of Cowper's life.

CLXIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR SIR,

July 30, 1780.

You may think perhaps that I deal more liberally with Mr. Unwin, in the way of poetical export than I do with you, and I believe you have reason: the truth is this;—If I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing before the window of a Privy Councillor, or a Chief Justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles, that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton: that the latter is already an apostle, while he himself is only undergoing the business of an incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in time. When my Muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of graver

cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton. This has been one reason why I have so long delayed the riddle. But lest I should seem to set a value upon it, that I do not, by making it an object of still further inquiry, here it comes:

I am just two and two, I am warm, I am cold,
And the parent of numbers that cannot be told;
I am lawful, unlawful—a duty, a fault;
I am often sold dear, good for nothing when bought,
An extraordinary boon, and a matter of course,
And yielded with pleasure—when taken by force.¹

W. C.

CLXX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.

. . . I have often promised myself a laugh with you about your pipe, but have always forgotten it when I have been writing, and at present I am not much in a laughing humour. You will observe, however, for your comfort and the honour of that same pipe, that it hardly falls within the lines of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard drinking. Your friends, indeed, have reason to complain that it frequently deprives them of the pleasure of your own conversation while it leads you either into your study or your garden; but in all other respects it is as innocent a pipe as can be. Smoke away, therefore; and remember that if one poet has condemned the practice, a better than he (the witty and elegant Hawkins Browne) has been warm in the praise of it. . . .

I nothing add but this—that *still I am*
Your most affectionate and humble

WILLIAM.

CLXXI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Olney, Sept. 24, 1786.

. . . You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton, which she has not yet answered, nor is likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me; I suppose because my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browse upon the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated

¹ The answer was "beauty's soft kiss."

into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel. That many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that he never so much doubted of my restoration to Christian privileges as now;—in short, that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney; by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him. We do not at all doubt it;—we never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of false accusation in a place ever fruitful of such productions, we do and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful, (for wonderful it would be at any rate,) because she sent him not long before a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality as ought to have convinced him that she at least was no wanderer. But what is the fact, and how do we spend our [time] in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst; that we have frequently taken airings with my cousin¹ in her carriage; and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening and sometimes by myself, which, however, your mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice, and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found anywhere. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick;—except indeed that, by her great kindness,

¹ Lady Hesketh

she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

My dear William, I do not know that I should have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars. He would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could of all our enormities! Adieu!

Our sincerest love to yourself and yours.

WM. C.

CLXXII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept 30, 1786

No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury,) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place,—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure, if not so close a confinement as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have been grieved, they have been misinformed; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province

and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which, in fact, it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance: more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business on the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Beaujeat turnpike and back again; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connexions; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbours to make, that, because the cause of the Gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse that we may have with them. In the meantime I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We put the all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, on the account of that cordial friendship of which

you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that notwithstanding all rumours to the contrary, we are exactly what we were when you saw us last;—I, miserable on account of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final; and she, seeking His return to me in the path of duty, and by continual prayer.¹

&

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CLXXIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Aug 16, 1789.

Mrs. Newton and you are both kind and just in believing that I do not love you less when I am long silent. Perhaps a friend of mine, who wishes me to have him always in my thoughts, is never so effectually possessed of the accomplishment of that wish, as when I have been long his debtor; for *then* I think of him not only every day, but day and night, and all day long. But I confess at the same time, that my thoughts of you will be more pleasant to myself when I shall have exonerated my conscience by giving you the letter so long your due. Therefore, here it comes;—little worth your having; but payment, such as it is, that you have a right to expect, and that is essential to my own tranquillity.

That the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should have proved the occasion of my suspending my correspondence with you, is a proof how little we foresee the consequences of what we publish. Homer, I dare say, hardly at all suspected that at the fag-end of time two personages would appear, the one ycleped Sir Newton, and the other Sir Cowper, who loving each other

¹ Note in Southey's edition

"I think it fitting here to extract Mr. Grimshawe's remarks upon this transaction:

"That the above letter may be fully understood, it is necessary to state, that Mr. Newton had received an intimation from Olney that the habits of Cowper, since the arrival of Lady Hesketh, had experienced a change; and that an admonitory letter from himself might not be without its use. Under these circumstances, Newton addressed such a letter to his friend as the occasion seemed to require. The answer of Cowper is already before the reader, and in our opinion amounts to a full justification of the poet's conduct. We know from various testimonies of unquestionable authority, that no charge tending to impeach the consistency of Mrs. Unwin, or of Cowper, can justly be alleged. If Newton should be considered as giving too easy a credence to these reports, or too rigid and ascetic in his spirit, we conceive that he could not, consistently with his own views as a faithful minister, and his deep interest in the welfare of Cowper, have acted otherwise, though he may possibly have expressed himself too strongly."—Vol. iii. pp. 220-1.

heartily, would nevertheless suffer the pains of an interrupted intercourse, his poems the cause. So, however, it has happened; and though it would not, I suppose, extort from the old bard a single sigh, if he knew it, yet to me it suggests the serious reflection above mentioned. An author by profession had need narrowly to watch his pen, lest a line should escape it which by possibility may do mischief, when he has been long dead and buried. What we have done, when we have written a book, will never be known till the day of judgement; then the account will be liquidated, and all the good that it has occasioned, and all the evil, will witness either for or against us.

I am now in the last book of the *Odyssey*, yet have still, I suppose, half a year's work before me. The accurate revision of two such voluminous poems can hardly cost me less. I rejoice, however, that the goal is in prospect; for though it has cost me years to run this race, it is only now that I begin to have a glimpse of it. That I shall never receive any proportionable pecuniary recompense for my long labours, is pretty certain; and as to any fame that I may possibly gain by it, *that* is a commodity that daily sinks in value, in measure as the consumption of all things approaches. In the day when the lion shall dandle the kid, and a little child shall lead them, the world will have lost all relish for the fabulous legends of antiquity, and Homer and his translator may budge off the stage together.

The ladies are coming down, and breakfast is at hand. Should I throw aside my letter unfinished, it is not probable that I shall be able to send it by this opportunity. Therefore that you may not wait longer for that for which you have waited too long already, I will only add that I always love and value you both as much as you can possibly wish, and that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances, my dear friend, ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

You know that Lady Hesketh is with us; you have had her compliments before, and I send them now, because she would bid me, if she knew that I write to you. We have a snug summer. Our neighbours are out on a ramble, and we have all their pleasant places to ourselves. Not that their return in September will interrupt our pleasures, for they are always kind and agreeable, but it will give them a different cast.

Pray remember me to Mr. Bacon.

2. THE REVEREND WILLIAM BULL

(LETTERS CLXXIV.—CLXXVI.)

"My Delphic oracle," as Cowper describes him, was the dissenting minister of Newport Pagnell, whom Newton introduced, and who succeeded him as spiritual counsellor. Despite the poet's strictures on tobacco, pipe-loving Bull was always welcome.

CLXXIV. TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY DEAR FRIEND, June 3, 1783.

My greenhouse, fronted with myrtles, and where I hear nothing but the pattering of a fine shower and the sound of distant thunder, wants only the fumes of your pipe to make it perfectly delightful.¹ Tobacco was not known in the golden age. So much the worse for the golden age. This age of iron, or lead, would be insupportable without it; and therefore we may reasonably suppose that the happiness of those better days would have been much improved by the use of it. We hope that you and your son are perfectly recovered. The season has been most unfavourable to animal life; and I, who am merely animal, have suffered much by it.

Though I should be glad to write, I write little or nothing. The time for such fruit is not yet come; but I expect it, and I wish for it. I want amusement: and, deprived of that, have none to supply the place of it. I send you, however, according to my promise to send you everything, two stanzas composed at the request of Lady Austen. She wanted words to a tune she much admired, and I gave her these on Peace.

Yours,

W. C.

CLXXV. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM, June 8, 1783.

Our severest winter, commonly called the spring, is now over, and I find myself seated in my favourite recess, the greenhouse. In such a situation, so silent, so shady, where no human foot is heard, and where only my myrtles presume to peep in at the window, you may suppose I have no interruption

¹ And so may smoke-inhaling Bull
Be always filling, never full.

Epistle to the Rev. William Bull.

to complain of, and that my thoughts are perfectly at my command. But the beauties of the spot are themselves an interruption; my attention is called upon by those very myrtles, by a double row of grass pinks just beginning to blossom, and by a bed of beans already in bloom; and you are to consider it, if you please, as no small proof of my regard, that though you have so many powerful rivals, I disengage myself from them all, and devote this hour entirely to you.

You are not acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Bull, of Newport; perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it,—an imagination which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party. At other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either; it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco. Nothing is perfect,—

*Nihil est ab omni
Parte beatum*

Yours,

W. C.

CLXXVI.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR,

I have a neighbour at Newport Pagnell, the Rev. Mr. Bull, master of an academy there, a man of genius, fine taste, and consummate erudition,—I will say of him, that he has few if any superiors in learning in this country. He is my intimate friend, and dines with us once a fortnight the year round. To him I have already read a part of my translation, and should be ashamed to repeat the terms in which he praised it. If any difficulty should occur, he is my Delphic oracle, to which I shall resort. He is affectionately at my service, and his erudition is

a bank upon which I can draw at pleasure. What interest he has is mine also, and he has already sent me names that will do honour to my list of subscribers. . . .

Farewell, thou beloved daughter of my beloved anonymous uncle.

3. THE THROCKMORTONS

(LETTERS CLXXVII.—CLXXIX.)

These Roman Catholic neighbours and friends of Cowper have already been sufficiently introduced in a previous letter (No. LVI). In spite of their difference of religion, Cowper became particularly intimate with the "Frogs," as he humorously named them, and spent many happy days in their society from 1783 till 1791, when Mr. Throckmorton succeeded to his father's estates in Berkshire.

CLXXVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, June 4 and 5, 1786.

. . . The Throckmortons sent a note to invite us to dinner; we went, and a very agreeable day we had. They made no fuss with us, which I was heartily glad to see, for where I give trouble I am sure that I cannot be welcome. Themselves, and their chaplain, and we, were all the party. After dinner we had much cheerful and pleasant talk, the particulars of which might not perhaps be so entertaining upon paper, therefore all but one I will omit, and that I will mention only because it will of itself be sufficient to give you an insight into their opinion on a very important subject,—their own religion. I happened to say that in all professions and trades mankind affected an air of mystery. Physicians, I observed, in particular, were objects of that remark, who persist in prescribing in Latin, many times no doubt to the hazard of a patient's life, through the ignorance of an apothecary. Mr. Throckmorton assented to what I said, and turning to his chaplain, to my infinite surprise observed to him, "That is just as absurd as our praying in Latin." I could have hugged him for his liberality, and freedom from bigotry, but thought it rather more decent to let the matter pass without any visible notice. I therefore heard it with pleasure, and kept my pleasure to myself. The two ladies in the mean time were *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room. Their conversation turned principally (as I afterwards learned from Mrs. Unwin) on a most delightful topic, viz. myself. In the first place, Mrs.

Throckmorton admired my book, from which she quoted by heart more than I could repeat, though I so lately wrote it.

In short, my dear, I cannot proceed to relate what she said of the book, and the book's author, for that abominable modesty that I cannot even yet get rid of. Let it suffice to say that you, who are disposed to love every body who speaks kindly of your cousin, will certainly love Mrs. Throckmorton, when you shall be told what she said of him: and that you *will* be told is equally certain, because it depends on Mrs. Unwin, who will tell you many a good long story for me, that I am not able to tell for myself. I am, however, not at all in arrear to our neighbours in the matter of admiration and esteem, but the more I know them, the more I like them, and have nearly an affection for them both. I am delighted that *The Task* has so large a share of the approbation of your sensible Suffolk friend. . . .

My dearest cousin, adieu! I hope to write to you but once more before we meet. But oh! this coachmaker, and oh! this holiday week!

Yours, with impatient desire to see you,

W. C.

CLXXVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, Feb 7, 1788.

. . . Mr. Bull, the lame curate, having been lately preferred to a living, another was of course wanted to supply his place. By the recommendation of Mr. Romaine, a Mr. C * * * came down. He lodges at Mr. Socket's in this village, and Mr. Socket lives in the small house to which you had once conceived a liking. Our lacquey is also clerk of the parish. C * * * a day or two after his arrival had a corpse to bury at Weston. Having occasion to consult with the clerk concerning this matter, he sought him in our kitchen. Samuel entered the study to inform us that there was a clergyman without: he was accordingly invited in, and in he came. We had but lately dined; the wine was on the table, and he drank three glasses while the corpse in question was getting ready for its last journey. The moment he entered the room, I felt myself incurably prejudiced against him: his features, his figure, his address, and all that he uttered, confirmed that prejudice, and I determined, having once seen him, to see him no more. Two days after he overtook me in the village. "Your humble servant, Mr. Cowper! a fine morning, sir, for a walk. I had liked to have called on you yesterday

morning to tell you that I had become your near neighbour. I live at Mr. Socket's." I answered without looking at him, as drily as possible.—"Are you come to stay any time in the country?"—He believed he was.—"Which way," I replied, "are you going? to Olney?"—"Yes."—"I am going to Mr. Throckmorton's garden, and I wish you a good day, sir."—I was in fact going to Olney myself, but this *rencontre* gave me such a violent twist another way that I found it impossible to recover that direction, and accordingly there we parted. All this I related at the Hall the next time we dined there, describing also my apprehensions and distress lest, whether I would or not, I should be obliged to have intercourse with a man to me so perfectly disagreeable. A good deal of laugh and merriment ensued, and there for that time it ended. The following Sunday, in the evening, I received a note to this purport: "Mr. C * * * 's compliments," &c. Understanding that my friends at the Hall were to dine with me the next day, he took the liberty to invite himself to eat a bit of mutton with me, being sure that I should be happy to introduce him. Having read the note, I threw it to Mrs. Unwin. "There," said I, "take that and read it; then tell me if it be not an effort of impudence the most extraordinary you ever heard of." I expected some such push from the man; I knew he was equal to it. She read it, and we were both of a mind. I sat down to my desk, and with a good deal of emotion gave it just such an answer as it would have deserved had it been genuine. But having heard by accident in the morning that he spells his name with a C, and observing in the note that it was spelt with a K, a suspicion struck me that it was a fiction. I looked at it more attentively and perceived that it was directed by Mrs. Throck. The inside I found afterwards was written by her brother George. This served us with another laugh on the subject, and I have hardly seen, and never spoken to, Mr. C * * * since. So, my dear, *that's the little story I promised you*. . . .

Good night, my dearest coz. Mrs. Unwin's love attends you.

Affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

CLXXIX.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

July 18, 1789.

Many thanks, my dear madam, for your extract from George's letter. I retain but little Italian, yet that little was so forcibly mustered by the consciousness that I was myself the subject, that I presently became master of it. I have always said that

George is a poet, and I am never in his company but I discover proofs of it; and the delicate address by which he has managed his complimentary mention of me, convinces me of it still more than ever. Here are a thousand poets of us, who have impudence enough to write for the public; but amongst the modest men who are by diffidence restrained from such an enterprise are those who would eclipse us all. I wish that George would make the experiment. I would bind on his laurels with my own hand.

Your gardener has gone after his wife, but having neglected to take his lyre, *alias* fiddle, with him, has not yet brought home his Eurydice. Your clock in the hall has stopped, and (strange to tell!) it stopped at sight of the watchmaker; for he only looked at it, and it has been motionless ever since. Mr. Gregson is gone, and the Hall is a desolation. Pray don't think any place pleasant that you may find in your rambles, that we may see you the sooner. Your aviary is all in good health. I pass it every day, and often inquire at the lattice; the inhabitants of it send their duty, and wish for your return. I took notice of the inscription on your seal, and had we an artist here capable of furnishing me with another, you should read on mine, "Encore une lettre."

Adieu,

W. C.

4. SAMUEL TEEDON

(LETTERS CLXXX.—CLXXXIV.)

One of the recipients of Mr. Smith's bounties administered by Cowper, this silly, prosy schoolmaster of Olney was at first treated by the poet with amused toleration. Later, in the poet's darker days, when other friends were absent, Teedon claimed to have oracular powers and Cowper turned to him—in vain—for spiritual comfort. We have, unfortunately, too many of the letters of which No. CLXXXIV is a specimen.

CLXXX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Nov 30, 1782

Since such is Mr. Smith's desire, we will dispose of the money before the expiration of the year. It is, indeed, already disposed of, except a very small part, which it was our intention to reserve till the increasing severity of the season should call for

the application of it. A man and his wife have been made so happy, that they could neither of them sleep for joy. They are perfectly honest, sober, and industrious, but with all their industry were unable to maintain themselves and five children, without running deeply in debt to the baker. The discharge of this debt, and the additional comfort of some necessary clothing were blessings so unexpected, that the transports they felt on receiving them are not often equalled.

Your friend, Mr. Teedon, who with all his foibles is a deserving man, so far at least as the strictest honesty and the most laborious attention to his little school, can entitle him to that character, has been very seasonably and substantially relieved. The poor man's writing paper was almost all expended, and not having wherewithal to purchase more, or to pay his small arrears to the stationer, he had fretted himself into a slow fever which Mr. Smith however has effectually cured, and he stands restored to his former health and sprightliness of conversation. Rent day was likewise near at hand, a formidable era, which I believe his indigence always obliges him to anticipate with horror; but the terrors of it are removed, and the sum of three guineas has performed all these wonders. Our judgement in these matters is, that it is better to give effectual relief to a few than to split a sum into diminutive items, the operation of which is scarcely perceptible among many. We have, however, delivered others from the entanglement of debts which, though small, were to them an insupportable burthen; and by putting a few shillings in their pockets, have encouraged them to undergo the drudgery of their miserable occupations with alacrity and delight. I have been rather circumstantial in my detail, because, though it is certain Mr. Smith would not have entrusted his bounty to our disposal, had he not had something like an implicit confidence in our discretion, it will perhaps afford him satisfaction to know, with some degree of particularity, in what manner that discretion has been exercised. We have given to none but the honest, the worthy, and consequently, I may add, to none but the truly grateful. . . .

I beg you will mention us handsomely to Mr. Smith and to Mr. and Mrs. Creuzé. Your mother is pretty well; her love attends you.

Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

CLXXXI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb. 7, 1785.

We live in a state of such uninterrupted retirement, in which incidents worthy to be recorded occur so seldom, that I always sit down to write with a discouraging conviction that I have nothing to say. The event commonly justifies the presage. For when I have filled my sheet, I find that I have said nothing. Be it known to you, however, that I may now at least communicate a piece of intelligence to which you will not be altogether indifferent, that I have received, and revised, and returned to Johnson, the two first proof sheets of my new publication. The business was dispatched indeed a fortnight ago, since when I have heard from him no further. From such a beginning, however, I venture to prognosticate the progress, and in due time the conclusion of the matter. . . .

"And is that all?" say you. Now, were I to hear you say so, I should look foolish and say—"Yes."—But having you at a distance, I snap my fingers at you, and say—"No, that is not all."—Mr Teedon, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening, as usual, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favour. "He had wished for many things (he said,) which, at the time when he formed those wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was that he might be connected with men of genius and ability;—and in my connexion with this worthy gentleman, (said he, turning to me,) that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified." You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead, when I heard this speech: and if you do, you will not be at all mistaken. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense. . . .

Present our love to all your comfortable fireside, and believe me ever most affectionately yours,

W. C.

CLXXXII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

July 27, 1785.

. . . Mr. Teedon has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very

acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion. . . .

Yours ever,
W. C.

CLXXXIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, Oct. 5, 1787.

My uncle's commendation of my handwriting was the more agreeable to me as I have seldom received any on that subject. I write generally in the helter-skelter way, concerning myself about nothing more than to be legible. I am sorry for his deafness, which I hope, however, by this time, the doctor and the doctor's engine have removed. It is well if he is cheerful under that malady, which oppresses the spirits of most men more than any other disorder that is not accompanied with pain. We have but few senses, and can spare none of them without much inconvenience. But I know that when my uncle's spirits are good, they are proof against all oppression. . . .

Poor Teedon, whom I dare say you remember, has never missed calling here once, and generally twice, a week since January last. The poor man has gratitude if he has not wit, and in the possession of that one good quality has a sufficient recommendation. I blame myself often for finding him tiresome, but cannot help it. My only comfort is that I should be more weary of thousands who have all the cleverness that has been denied to Teedon. . . .

With Mrs. U.'s affectionate respects, my dearest cousin,
I am ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

CLXXXIV.

TO SAMUEL TEEDON, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Dec. 4, 1792.

In your last experience, extraordinary as it was, I found nothing presumptuous. God is free to manifest Himself, both in manner and measure as He pleases; and to you He is pleased to manifest Himself uncommonly in both. It would be better with poor me, if, being the subject of so many of your manifestations, (for which I desire to be thankful both to God and you,) I were made in some small degree at least partaker of the comfort of them. But except that my nights are less molested than they used to be, I perceive at present no alteration at all for the

better. My days are, many of them, stormy in the extreme, and the best of them are darkly clouded with melancholy.

Still I am waiting for freedom of mind and spirit, as well as for leisure and opportunity, to proceed with Milton. Yet the answers you have received to your prayers on that subject have been so explicit,¹ that I know not how to desire you to make it a matter of prayer again. It is certain, nevertheless, that without some great change both in my mind and outward circumstances, I shall never be able to perform that work, or never able to perform it well. My eyes too for a long time have been inflamed to a degree that would alone disable me for such a labour. God knows how much I feel myself in want of animal spirits, courage, hope, and all mutual requisites,—to a wonderful degree, considering the prayers that have been made, and the answers that have been obtained about it.

You ought not to suffer anxiety on temporal accounts to rob you of your peace, as I suspect it has done lately. He that gives you so plentifully the bread of life, will He not give you the bread that perishes? Doubtless He will. Fear not.

W. C.

5. THE REVEREND WALTER BAGOT

(LETTER CLXXXV)

An old schoolfellow who sought to renew acquaintance with Cowper after reading his *Moral Satires*.

CLXXXV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN.

Nov 30, 1785

. . . My dear, I have another story to tell you, but of a different kind. At Westminster School I was much intimate with Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot. In the course, as I suppose, of more than twenty years after we left school, I saw him but twice;—once when I called on him at Oxford, and once when he called on me in the Temple. He has a brother who lives about four miles from hence, a man of large estate. It happened that soon after the publication of my first volume, he came into this country on a visit to his brother. Having read my book, and liking it, he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me. I felt much affection for him, and the more

¹ That Cowper should proceed with the work. -

because it was plain that after so long a time he still retained his for me. He is now at his brother's; twice has he visited me in the course of the last week, and this morning he brought Mrs. Bagot with him. He is a good and amiable man, and she a most agreeable woman. At this second visit I made him acquainted with my translation of Homer; he was highly pleased to find me so occupied, and with all that glow of friendship that would make it criminal in me to doubt his sincerity for a moment, insisted upon being employed in promoting the subscription, and engaged himself and all his connexions, which are extensive, and many of them of high rank, in my service. His chariot put up at an inn in the town while he was here, and I rather wondered that at his departure he chose to walk to his chariot, and not to be taken up at the door; but when he had been gone about a quarter of an hour his servant came with a letter his master had written at the inn, and which, he said, required no answer. I opened it, and found as follows;—

"MY GOOD FRIEND,

Olney, Nov 30, 1785

"You will oblige me by accepting this early subscription to your Homer, even before you have fixed your plan and price; which when you have done, if you will send me a parcel of your subscription papers, I will endeavour to circulate them among my friends and acquaintance as far as I can. Health and happiness attend you.

"Yours ever,

"WALTER BAGOT."

N.B. It contained a draft for twenty pounds. . . .

Adieu, my faithful, kind, and consolatory friend!

Ever, ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

6. SAMUEL ROSE

(LETTER CLXXXVI.)

The son of a Chiswick schoolmaster and student of Glasgow University, he it was that introduced Cowper to the poetry of Burns.

CLXXXVI.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Weston, Aug. 27, 1787.

I have not yet taken up the pen again, except to write to you. The little taste that I have had of your company, and your

kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years; that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life, I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard, as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me, will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if, on a future occasion, I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so,—is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it, I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer. . . .

W. C.

7. CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

(LETTER CLXXXVII.)

A fellow Templar, who, like Bagot, resumed his friendship with Cowper after reading his poetry

CLXXXVII. TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR ROWLEY, Weston Underwood, Feb 21, 1788.

I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbours in the Temple. From the Temple I went to St. Alban's, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connexion with a most valuable family of the name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead; his only son is dead; the daughter is married and gone northward; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements

would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with which we much associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse; there is no need, therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our village on all sides to a considerable distance. These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbours above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding, who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh (widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember,) spends part of the year with us, during which time I have means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing? Translating Homer. Is not this, you will say, *actum agere*? But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a schoolboy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on

and especially because I have been myself the instrument of conveying it.

Since the receipt of your obliging letter, I have naturally had recourse to my recollection to try if it would furnish me with the name that I find at the bottom of it. At the same time, I am aware that there is nothing more probable than that my brother might be honoured with your friendship without mentioning it to me; for except a very short period before his death, we lived necessarily at a considerable distance from each other. Ascribe it, madam, not to an impertinent curiosity, but to a desire of better acquaintance with you, if I take the liberty to ask, (since ladies' names, at least, are changeable,) whether yours was at that time the same as now?

Sincerely wishing you all happiness, and especially that which I am sure you covet most, the happiness which is from above, I remain, dear madam—early as it may seem to say it,

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

CLXXXIX.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, March 3, 1788.

I owe you many acknowledgments, dear madam, for that unreserved communication, both of your history and of your sentiments, with which you favoured me in your last. It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are so happily circumstanced, both in respect of situation and frame of mind. With your view of religious subjects, you could not indeed, speaking properly, be pronounced unhappy in any circumstances; but to have received from above not only that faith which reconciles the heart to affliction, but many outward comforts also, and especially that greatest of all earthly comforts, a comfortable home, is happiness indeed. May you long enjoy it! As to health or sickness, you have learned already their true value, and know well that the former is no blessing, unless it be sanctified, and that the latter is one of the greatest we can receive, when we are enabled to make a proper use of it.

There is nothing in my story that can possibly be worth your knowledge; yet, lest I should seem to treat you with a reserve which, at your hands, I have not experienced, such as it is, I will relate it.—I was bred to the law; a profession to which I was never much inclined, and in which I engaged rather because I was desirous to gratify a most indulgent father, than

because I had any hopes of success in it myself. I spent twelve years in the Temple, where I made no progress in that science, to cultivate which I was sent thither. During this time my father died. Not long after him, died my mother-in-law; and at the expiration of it, a melancholy seized me, which obliged me to quit London, and consequently to renounce the bar. I lived some time at St. Alban's. After having suffered in that place long and extreme affliction, the storm was suddenly dispelled, and the same day-spring from on high which has arisen upon you, arose on me also. I spent eight years in the enjoyment of it; and have ever since the expiration of those eight years, been occasionally the prey of the same melancholy as at first. In the depths of it I wrote *The Task*, and the volume which preceded it; and in the same deeps am now translating Homer. But to return to Saint Alban's. I abode there a year and half. Thence I went to Cambridge, where I spent a short time with my brother, in whose neighbourhood I determined, if possible, to pass the remainder of my days. He soon found a lodging for me at Huntingdon. At that place I had not resided long, when I was led to an intimate connexion with a family of the name of Unwin. I soon quitted my lodging, and took up my abode with them. I had not lived long under their roof, when Mr. Unwin, as he was riding one Sunday morning to his cure at Gravelly, was thrown from his horse; of which fall he died. Mrs. Unwin having the same views of the gospel as myself, and being desirous of attending a purer ministration of it than was to be found at Huntingdon, removed to Olney, where Mr. Newton was at that time the preacher, and I with her. There we continued till Mr. Newton, whose family was the only one in the place with which we could have a connexion, and with whom we lived always on the most intimate terms, left it. After his departure, finding the situation no longer desirable, and our house threatening to fall upon our heads, we removed hither. Here we have a good house, in a most beautiful village, and, for the greatest part of the year, a most agreeable neighbourhood. Like you, madam, I stay much at home, and have not travelled twenty miles from this place and its environs, more than once these twenty years.

All this I have written, not for the singularity of the matter, as you will perceive, but partly for the reason which I gave at the outset, and partly that, seeing we are become correspondents, we may know as much of each other as we can, and that as soon as possible.

I beg, madam, that you will present my best respects to Mr. King, whom, together with yourself, should you at any time hereafter take wing for a longer flight than usual, we shall be happy to receive at Weston; and believe me, dear madam, his and your obliged and affectionate,

W. C.

CXC.

TO MRS. KING

MY DEAR MADAM,

Weston Underwood, Aug 28, 1788.

Should you discard me from the number of your correspondents, you would treat me as I seem to deserve, though I do not actually deserve it. I have lately been engaged with company at our house, who resided with us five weeks, and have had much of the rheumatism into the bargain. Not in my fingers, you will say;—True. But you know as well as I, that pain, be it where it may, indisposes us to writing.

You express some degree of wonder that I found you out to be sedentary, at least much a stayer within doors, without any sufficient data for my direction. Now if I should guess your figure and stature with equal success, you will deem me not only a poet but a conjuror. Yet in fact I have no pretensions of that sort. I have only formed a picture of you in my own imagination, as we ever do of a person of whom we think much, though we have never seen that person. Your height I conceive to be about five feet five inches, which, though it would make a short man, is yet height enough for a woman. If you insist on an inch or two more, I have no objection. You are not very fat, but somewhat inclined to be fat, and unless you allow yourself a little more air and exercise, will incur some danger of exceeding in your dimensions before you die. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to you to walk a little more, at least in your garden, and to amuse yourself occasionally with pulling up here and there a weed, for it will be an inconvenience to you to be much fatter than you are, at a time of life when your strength will be naturally on the decline. I have given you a fair complexion, a slight tinge of the rose in your cheeks, dark brown hair, and, if the fashion would give you leave to show it, an open and well-formed forehead. To all this I add a pair of eyes not quite black, but nearly approaching to that hue, and very animated. I have not absolutely determined on the shape of your nose, or the form of your mouth; but should you tell me that I have in other respects drawn a

tolerable likeness, have no doubt but I can describe them too. I assure you that though I have a great desire to read him, I have never seen Lavater, nor have availed myself in the least of any of his rules on this occasion. Ah, madam! if with all that sensibility of yours, which exposes you to so much sorrow, and necessarily must expose you to it, in a world like this, I have had the good fortune to make you smile, I have then painted you, whether with a strong resemblance, or with none at all, to very good purpose.

I had intended to have sent you a little poem, which I have lately finished, but have no room to transcribe it. You shall have it by another opportunity. Breakfast is on the table, and my time also fails, as well as my paper. I rejoice that a cousin of yours found my volumes agreeable to him, for, being your cousin, I will be answerable for his good taste and judgement.

When I wrote last, I was in mourning for a dear and much-valued uncle, Ashley Cowper. He died at the age of eighty-six. My best respects attend Mr. King; and, I am, dear madam,

Most truly yours,

W. C.

9. JOHN JOHNSON ("JOHNNY")

(LETTERS CXCI.-CXCIL.)

"There is a simplicity in his character that charms me," said Cowper, and it was this charming young Norfolk kinsman that did so much to alleviate the mental sufferings of the poet in his last years.

CXCI.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 26, 1790.

My blunder in thanking thee, my dearest coz, for a basket instead of a box, seems to have had something prophetic in it; for in the evening a basket sent from you, and filled with excellent fishes actually arrived: with some of them we have compensated our neighbours for pigs presented to us in times past, and on the remainder we have chiefly subsisted ever since, nor is our stock even now exhausted. Many thanks are due to thee for this supply, and we pay them with much sincerity.

Could I blunder as I did in the instance of my Norfolk cousin, always, I mean, with such ludicrous consequences, I should be tempted to do it daily. I have not laughed so much many a

long day as at your and his droll account of the strange and unimaginable distresses that ensued on the mere omission of those two important syllables that compose the name of Johnson.

It gives me great pleasure that you are so much pleased with him, because I was much pleased with him myself. There is a simplicity in his character that charms me, and the more because it is so great a rarity. Humour he certainly has, and of the most agreeable kind. His letter to you proves it, and so does his poem; and that he has many other talents which, at present, his shyness too much suppresses, I doubt not. He has a countenance which, with all the sweetness of temper that it expresses, expresses also a mind much given to reflection, and an understanding that in due time will know how to show itself to advantage.

An indisposition from which Mrs. Frog was not sufficiently recovered to see company, and especially a stranger, was the reason of our not being invited while he was with me. She is now, however, perfectly restored; I dined there the day after he went, and dine there again to-morrow.

The young man begged that he might carry away with him eight or ten books of Homer, which he would transcribe for me, he said, at Cambridge; but I feared to trust them in that pestilent place, where some of his wild young *Trigrymates* might have snatched them from him, and have done with them I know not what. . . .

Our friends at the Hall are all pretty well at present; but the lord of the mansion has not perfectly recovered his foot again. Mrs. Unwin still has her fever, which chiefly attacks her in the night. Beau is well, as are the two cats, and the three birds, whose cages I am going to clean, and all send their love to you.

Yours, my dear,

WM. C.

CXCII.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

Weston, Jan. 21, 1791.

I know that you have already been catechised by Lady Hesketh on the subject of your return hither before the winter shall be over, and shall therefore only say that, if you CAN COME, we shall be happy to receive you. Remember also that nothing can excuse the non-performance of a promise, but absolute necessity! In the mean time my faith in your veracity is such, that I am persuaded you will suffer nothing less than necessity to prevent

it. Were you not extremely pleasant to us, and just the sort of youth that suits us, we should neither of us have said half so much, or perhaps a word on the subject.

Yours, my dear Johnny, are vagaries that I shall never see practised by any other; and whether you slap your ankle, or reel as if you were fuddled, or dance in the path before me, all is characteristic of yourself, and therefore to me delightful. I have hinted to you indeed sometimes, that you should be cautious of indulging antic habits and singularities of all sorts, and young men in general have need enough of such admonition. But yours are a sort of fairy habits, such as might belong to Puck or Robin Goodfellow, and therefore, good as the advice is, I should be half sorry should you take it.

This allowance at least I give you:—continue to take your walks, if walks they may be called, exactly in their present fashion, till you have taken orders. Then indeed, forasmuch as a skipping, curvetting, bounding divine might be a spectacle not altogether seemly, I shall consent to your adoption of a more grave demeanour.

W. C.

10. WILLIAM HAYLEY

(LETTERS CXCH.—CXCV.)

Another staunch friend who, without the slightest trace of envy against the poet that had supplanted him in the popular estimation, strove to divert Cowper's mind from melancholy reflections.

CXCH.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, June 7, 1792

Of what materials can you suppose me made, if after all the rapid proofs that you have given me of your friendship, I do not love you with all my heart, and regret your absence continually? But you must permit me nevertheless to be melancholy now and then; or if you will not, I must be so without your permission; for that sable thread is so intermixed with the very thread of my existence, as to be inseparable from it, at least while I exist in the body. Be content therefore; let me sigh and groan, but always be sure that I love you! You will be well assured that I should not have indulged myself in this rhapsody about myself and my melancholy, had my present

mood been of that complexion, or had not our poor Mary seemed still to advance in her recovery. So in fact she does, and has performed several little feats to-day; such as either she could not perform at all, or very feebly, while you were with us.

I shall be glad if you have seen Johnny as I call him, my Norfolk cousin; he is a sweet lad, but as shy as a bird. It costs him always two or three days to open his mouth before a stranger; but when he does, he is sure to please by the innocent cheerfulness of his conversation. His sister too is one of my idols, for the resemblance she bears to my mother.

Mary and you have all my thoughts; and how should it be otherwise? She looks well, is better, and loves you dearly;

Adieu! my brother,

W. C.

CXCIV.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

Weston, Jan. 20, 1793.

Now I know that you are safe, I treat you, as you see, with a philosophical indifference, not acknowledging your kind and immediate answer to anxious inquiries, till it suits my own convenience. I have learned, however, from my late solicitude, that not only you, but yours, interest me to a degree that, should anything happen to either of you, would be very inconsistent with my peace. Sometimes I thought that you were extremely ill, and once or twice, that you were dead. As often some tragedy reached my ear concerning little Tom. "*O, vanæ mentes hominum!*" How liable are we to a thousand impositions, and how indebted to honest old Time, who never fails to undeceive us! Whatever you had in prospect you acted kindly by me not to make me partaker of your expectations, for I have a spirit, if not so sanguine as yours, yet that would have waited for your coming with anxious impatience, and have been dismally mortified by the disappointment. Had you come, and come without notice too, you would not have surprised us more, than (as the matter was managed) we were surprised at the arrival of your picture. It reached us in the evening, after the shutters were closed, at a time when a chaise might actually have brought you without giving us the least previous intimation. Then it was, that Samuel, with his cheerful countenance, appeared at the study door, and with a voice as cheerful as his looks, exclaimed, "Mr. Hayley is come, Madam!" We both started, and in the same moment cried, "Mr. Hayley come!

and where is he?" The next moment corrected our mistake, and finding Mary's voice grow suddenly tremulous, I turned and saw her weeping.

I do nothing, notwithstanding all your exhortations: my idleness is a proof against them all, or to speak more truly my difficulties are so. Something indeed I do. I play at push-pin with Homer every morning before breakfast, fingering and polishing, as Paris did his armour. I have lately had a letter from Dublin on that subject, which has pleased me.

W. C.

VI. OLNEY AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICT

In Cowper's first letter to Joseph Hill from Olney he remarks, "I have no map to consult at present, but by what remembrance I have of this place in the last I saw, it lies at the northernmost point of the county [Buckinghamshire] We are just five miles beyond Newport Pagnell." The town consisted of one long street, "abominably dirty," and, with the exception of the vicarage, Cowper's residence was the only one of any importance.

I. THE INHABITANTS

(LETTERS CXC.-CCI.)

The state of affairs at Olney, which Cowper describes with the realism of a Crabbe, was fairly representative of the country at large. Pauperism was on the increase owing to the rising prices caused by heavy taxation, and the wretchedly paid lace-makers of the town could not, with all their many hours of toil, earn sufficient to maintain themselves and their "half-starved" families. Typical, also, is the picture of their ignorance and depravity, even "children, seven years of age, infest the streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet," and the Sabbath was disturbed by the brawling of the "ladies of Silver End."

CXC.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MON AMI,

July 8, 1780.

If you ever take the tip of the Chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb, you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose, than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the lace-makers. I am an eye-witness of their poverty, and do know that hundreds in this little town are upon the point of starving, and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it. I know that the bill¹ by which they would have been so fatally affected is thrown out: but Lord Stormont threatens them with another; and if another like it should pass, they are undone. We lately sent a petition from hence to Lord Dartmouth²; I signed it,

¹ One of the many Factory Acts of this time.

² Newton's philanthropic patron.

and am sure the contents are true. The purport of it was to inform him that there are very near one thousand two hundred lace-makers in this beggarly town, the most of whom had reason enough, while the bill was in agitation, to look upon every loaf they bought as the last they should ever be able to earn. I can never think it good policy to incur the certain inconvenience of ruining thirty thousand, in order to prevent a remote and possible damage though to a much greater number. The measure is like a scythe, and the poor lace-makers are the sickly crop that trembles before the edge of it. The prospect of peace with America is like the streak of dawn in their horizon; but this bill is like a black cloud behind it, that threatens their hope of a comfortable day with utter extinction.

I did not perceive till this moment, that I had tacked two similes together; a practice which, though warranted by the example of Homer, and allowable in an epic poem, is rather luxuriant and licentious in a letter: lest I should add another, I conclude.

W. C.

CXCVI: TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 27, 1780.

. . . When I began, I expected no interruption. But if I had expected interruptions without end, I should have been less disappointed. First came the barber¹; who, after having embellished the outside of my head, has left the inside just as unfurnished as he found it. Then came Olney bridge,—not into the house, but into the conversation. The cause relating to it was tried on Tuesday at Buckingham. The judge directed the jury to find a verdict favourable to Olney. The jury consisted of one knave and eleven fools. The last-mentioned followed the afore-mentioned, as sheep follow a bell-wether, and decided in direct opposition to the said judge. Then a flaw was discovered in the indictment. The indictment was quashed, and an order made for a new trial. The new trial will be in the King's Bench, where said knave and said fools will have nothing to do with it. So the men of Olney fling up their caps, and assure themselves of a complete victory. A victory will save me and your mother many shillings, perhaps some pounds, which, except that it has afforded me a subject to write upon, was the only reason why I have said so much about it. I know you take

¹ Mr Wilson, to whom *John Gulpin* was first sent.

an interest in all that concerns us, and will consequently rejoice with us in the prospect of an event in which we are concerned so nearly.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

CXC VII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Nov. 18, 1782.

On the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgments, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend Mr. Smith. I call him ours, because having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness to succour the distressed, my ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest secrecy; no creature shall hear him mentioned, either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honour to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money; but in this town, where the Gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favoured so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all, and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure them bread.¹ We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing. Thanks are due to yourself likewise, and are hereby accordingly rendered, for waiving your claim in behalf of your own parishioners. You are always with them, and they are always, at least some of them,

¹ *You cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store, . . .
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light.*

the better for your residence among them. Olney is a populous place, inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and the ragged of the earth, and it is not possible for our small party and small ability to extend their operations so far as to be much felt among such numbers. Accept therefore your share of their gratitude, and be convinced that when they pray for a blessing upon those who have relieved their wants, He that answers that prayer, and when He answers it, will remember His servant at Stock. . . .

Yours, my dear William,
W. C.

CXCVIII. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 24, 1785.

. . . Mr. Scott¹ called upon us yesterday: he is much inclined to set up a Sunday school, if he can raise a fund for the purpose. Mr. Jones has had one some time at Clifton; and Mr. Unwin writes me word that he has been thinking of nothing else day and night, for a fortnight. It is a wholesome measure, that seems to bid fair to be pretty generally adopted, and for the good effects that it promises, deserves well to be so. I know not, indeed, while the spread of the gospel continues so limited as it is, how a reformation of manners, in the lower class of mankind, can be brought to pass; or by what other means the utter abolition of all principle among them, moral as well as religious, can possibly be prevented. Heathenish parents can only bring up heathenish children; an assertion no where oftener or more clearly illustrated than at Olney; where children, seven years of age, infest the streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet. Such urchins as these could not be so diabolically accomplished, unless by the connivance of their parents. It is well, indeed, if in some instances their parents be not themselves their instructors. Judging by their proficiency, one can hardly suppose any other. It is, therefore, doubtless an act of the greatest charity to snatch them out of such hands, before the inveteracy of the evil shall have made it desperate. Mr. Teedon, I should imagine, will be employed as a teacher, should this expedient be carried into effect. I know not, at least, that we have any other person among us so well qualified for the service. He is indisputably a Christian man, and miserably poor, whose

¹ One of Newton's successors at Olney.

revenues need improvement, as much as any children in the world can possibly need instruction. . . .

Believe me, my dear friend,
With true affection, yours,

W. C.

CXCIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 5, 1785.

. . . This being the fifth of November, is the worst of all days in the year for letter-writing. Continually called upon to remember the bonfire, one is apt to forget everything else. The boys at Olney have likewise a very entertaining sport, which commences annually upon this day: they call it Hockey; and it consists in dashing each other with mud, and the windows also, so that I am forced to rise now and then, and to threaten them with a horsewhip, to preserve our own. We know that the Roman boys whipped tops, trundled the hoop, and played at tennis; but I believe we nowhere read that they delighted in these filthy aspersions: I am inclined, therefore, to give to the slovenly but ingenious youths of Olney full credit for the invention. It will be well if the Sunday school may civilise them to a taste for more refined amusements. That measure is so far in forwardness that a subscription is made: but it amounts, I am told, to no more than nineteen pounds; a feeble beginning, which, as taxes are continually growing, promises no long duration. . . .

We are tolerably well: and Mrs. Unwin adds to mine her affectionate remembrances of yourself and Mrs. Newton.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CC.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 24, 1788.

. . . I have not lately had an opportunity of seeing Mr. Bean.¹ The late rains, which have revived the hopes of the farmers, have intercepted our communication. I hear, however, that he meets with not a little trouble in his progress towards a reformation of Olney manners; and that the Sabbath, which he wishes to have hallowed by a stricter and more general observation of it, is, through the brutality of the lowest order, a day of more turbulence and riot than any other. At the end of last week he found himself obliged to make another trip to

¹ The new vicar of Olney.

the justice, in company with two or three of the principal inhabitants. What passed I have not learned; but I understand their errand to have been, partly at least, to efface the evil impressions made on his worship's mind, by a rascal who had applied to him a day or two before for a warrant against the constable; which, however, he did not obtain. I rather fear that the constables are not altogether judicious in the exercise either of their justice or their mercy. Some who have seemed proper objects of punishment, they have released, on a hopeless promise of better behaviour; and others, whose offence has been personal against themselves, though in some respects less guilty, they have set in the stocks. The ladies, however, and of course the ladies of Silver End¹ in particular, give them the most trouble, being always active on these occasions, as well as clamorous, and both with impunity. For the sex are privileged in the free use of their tongues, and of their nails, the Parliament having never yet laid them under any penal restrictions; and they employ them accordingly. Johnson, the constable, lost much of his skin, and still more of his coat, in one of these Sunday battles: and had not Ashburner² hastened to his aid, had probably been completely stripped of both. With such a zeal are these fair ones animated, though, unfortunately for all parties, rather erroneously. . . .

I remain, my dear friend,

Affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 2, 1788.

. . . Mr. Bean has still some trouble with his parishioners. The suppression of five public-houses³ is the occasion. He called on me yesterday morning for advice; though, discreet as he is himself, he has little need of such counsel as I can give him. Harold, who is subtle as a dozen foxes, met him on Sunday, exactly at his descent from the pulpit, and proposed to him a general meeting of the parish, in vestry, on the subject. Mr.

¹ The slum end of the town where Cowper's house was situated:

"Deep in the abyss of Silver End."

² The draper, a man of great strength.

³ Such a whiff

Of stale debauch forth issuing from the styes
That law has licensed, as makes temperance reel.

The Task, IV. 469-71.

Bean, attacked so violently, consented, but afterwards repented that he had done so, assured as he was that he should be out-voted. There seemed no remedy but to apprise them beforehand that he would meet them indeed, but not with a view to have the question decided by the majority; that he would take that opportunity to make his allegations against each of the houses in question, which if they could refute, well; if not, they could no longer reasonably oppose his measures. This was what he came to submit to my opinion. I could do no less than approve it; and he left me with a purpose to declare his mind to them immediately. . . .

Most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

2. THE ROADS

(LETTERS CCII.-CCV.)

Agam Olney was typical of the country as a whole. The English roads in the eighteenth century were in a deplorable condition: new turnpikes were resisted by the populace because of the additional tolls that would be levied, and even where they were constructed, the work was frequently undertaken by unskilled men. The country roads were mere quagmires and it is not surprising to find Cowper writing, "A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty: yet it is all that we had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner."

CCII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 6, 1782.

. . . No winter since we knew Olney has kept us more closely confined than the present; either the ways have been so dirty or the weather so rough, that we have not more than three times escaped into the fields, since last autumn. This does not suit Mrs. Unwin, to whom air and exercise, her only remedies, are almost absolutely necessary. Neither are my frequent calls into the garden altogether sufficient for me. Man, a changeable creature himself, seems to subsist best in a state of variety, as his proper element. A melancholy man at least is apt to grow sadly weary of the same walls, and the same pales, and to find that the same scene will suggest the same thoughts perpetually. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir,

WM. COWPER.

CCIII.

†

TO LADY AUSTEN

To watch the storms, and hear the sky
 Give all our almanacks the lie;
 To shake with cold, and see the plains
 In autumn drown'd with wintry rains;
 'Tis thus I spend my moments here,
 And wish myself a Dutch Mynheer;
 I then should have no need of wit,
 For lumpish Hollander unfit.
 Nor should I then repine at mud,
 Or meadows deluged with a flood;
 But in a bog live well content,
 And find it just my element;
 Should be a clod, and not a man,
 Nor wish in vain for Sister Ann,
 With charitable aid to drag
 My mind out of its proper quag;
 Should have the genius of a boor,
 And no ambition to have more.

MY DEAR SISTER,

You see my beginning. I do not know but in time I may proceed even to the printing of halfpenny ballads—Excuse the coarseness of my paper; I wasted such a quantity before I could accomplish anything legible, that I could not afford finer. I intend to employ an ingenious mechanic of the town to make me a longer case; for you may observe that my lines turn up their tails like Dutch mastiffs, so difficult do I find it to make the two halves exactly coincide with each other.

We wait with impatience for the departure of this unseasonable flood. We think of you, and talk of you, but we can do no more, till the waters shall subside. I do not think our correspondence should drop because we are within a mile of each other. It is but an imaginary approximation, the flood having in reality as effectually parted us as if the British Channel rolled between us.

Yours, my dear sister, with Mrs. Unwin's best love,

W. C.

Aug. 12, 1782.

CCIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Nov. 3, 1787.

Suffer not thyself, my dearest coz, to be seduced from thy purpose. There are those among thy friends and kindred who being covetous of thy company will endeavour to keep thee near them, and the better to effect their machinations, will possess thee, if they can, with many megrims concerning the roads and the season of the year. But heed them not. They only

do what I should do myself were I in their predicament, who certainly should not fail, for my own sake, to represent your intended journey as an enterprise rather to be admired than approved—more bold than prudent. The turnpike, as you well know, will facilitate your progress every inch of the way till you come to Sherrington, and from Sherrington hither you will find the way equally safe, though undoubtedly a little rough. Rough it was when you were here, such it is still, but not rougher than then, nor will it be so. The reason is this—that the soil being naturally a rock is very little, or rather not at all affected by the season, for as thou well knowest, no showers will melt a stone. The distance also from Sherrington toll-gate to our door is but four miles and a quarter. The only reason why I do not recommend the back road rather than this, is because it is apt to be heavy; in other respects it deserves the preference, for it is just as safe as the other, and from the turning at Gayhurst, is shorter than that by a mile and a half. The Throcks travel them both continually, and so do all the chaises and coaches in the country, and I never heard of an accident to any of them in all the twenty years that I have lived in it. Mr. and Mrs. Throck, understanding that you are a little apprehensive on this subject, begged me yesterday evening to tell you that *they* will send their servant to meet you at Newport, who will direct your *cocher* to all the best and most commodious quarters. As to the season of the year, I grant that it is November. It would be but folly to deny it. But what then?—Does not the sun shine in November? One would imagine that it did not, could not, or would not, were we to listen only to the suggestions of certain persons. But, my dear, the matter is far otherwise; nay it is even just the reverse; for he not only shines, but with such splendour too, that I write at this moment in a room heated by his beams, and with the curtain at my side let down on purpose to abate their fervour. Then let November have its just praise, and let not my cousin fear to find the country pleasant even now. I have said it in verse, and I think it in prose, that as it is at all times preferable to the town, so is it especially preferable in winter, provided I mean that you have gravel to walk upon, of which there is no scarcity at Weston. . . .

Adieu, my dear. Our best love, and best wishes are always with you.

Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

THE COUNTRYSIDE ROUND OLNEY 221

CCV.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 26, 1791.

. . . It gives us true pleasure that you interest yourself so much in the state of our turnpike. Learn then the present state of it. From Gayhurst to Weston the road is a gravel-walk, but Weston itself is at present in a chaotic condition. About three weeks since they dug up the street, and having done so, left it. But it will not continue long in such disorder, and when you see it next you will find the village wonderfully improved. Already they have filled up two abominable ponds more foetid than any human nostrils could endure; they were to be found as you must remember, one just under Farmer Archer's window, and the other a little beyond it. Covered drains are to be made wherever drains are wanted, and the causey is to be new-laid. When all this is done and the road well gravelled, we will hold our heads as high as any villagers in the kingdom. At the present time they are at work on the road from Weston to Olney. Olney is also itself in a state of beautification, and the road between Olney and Bedford is, I believe, nearly finished, but that I have never seen. The sooner you come to look at these things with your own eyes, the better. . . .

Ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

3. THE COUNTRYSIDE

(LETTERS CCVI.-CCXIII.)

What Wordsworth has done for the Lake District, Cowper did for Olney and the vicinity. So minutely has he described this area in *The Task* and in his letters that the reader is as familiar with it as he is with his own immediate neighbourhood: the spinney, the alcove, the peasant's nest, the lime-walk, and Yardley Oak are all familiar landmarks on his mental horizon.

CCVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 29, 1781.

. . . I lately heard a story from a lady, who has spent many years of her life in France, somewhat to the present purpose. An Abbé, universally esteemed for his piety, and especially for the meekness of his manners, had yet undesignedly given some offence to a shabby fellow in his parish. The man, concluding he

might do as he pleased with so forgiving and gentle a character, struck him on one cheek, and bade him turn the other. The good man did so, and when he had received the two slaps, which he thought himself obliged to submit to, turned again, and beat him soundly. I do not wish to see you follow the French gentleman's example, but I believe nobody that has heard the story condemns him much for the spirit he showed upon the occasion.

I had the relation from Lady Austen, sister to Mrs. Jones, wife of the minister at Clifton. She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me; insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday se'night we all dined together in the *Spinnic*—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *Fête Champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under a great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other. A happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of.

Yours, with our joint love,

W. C.

CCVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Olney, Dec. 6, 1785.

. . . I never answered your question concerning my strong partiality to a common. I well remember making the speech of which you remind me, and the very place where I made it was upon a common, in the neighbourhood of Southampton, the name of which, however, I have forgot. But I perfectly recollect that I boasted of the sagacity that you mention just after having carried you over a dirty part of the road that led to it. My nostrils have hardly been regaled with those wild odours from that day to the present. We have no such here. If there ever were any such in this country, the enclosures have long since destroyed them; but we have a scent in the fields about Olney, that to me is equally agreeable, and which, even after attentive

examination, I have never been able to account for. It proceeds, so far as I can find, neither from herb, nor tree, nor shrub: I should suppose therefore that it is in the soil. It is exactly the scent of amber when it has been rubbed hard, only more potent. I have never observed it except in hot weather, or in places where the sun shines powerfully, and from which the air is excluded. I had a strong poetical desire to describe it when I was writing the Common-scene in *The Task*,¹ but feared lest the unfrequency of such a singular property in the earth, should have tempted the reader to ascribe it to a fanciful nose, at least to have suspected it for a deliberate fiction. . . .

Mrs. Unwin, (who begs to be mentioned to you with affectionate respect,) sits knitting my stockings at my elbow, with a degree of industry worthy of Penelope herself. You will not think this an exaggeration when I tell you that I have not bought a pair these twenty years, either of thread, silk, or worsted.

Adieu, my most beloved cousin; if you get this before I have an answer to my last, let me soon have an answer to them both.

Truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

May 1, 1786

. . . Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful; but it is a walk to get at them; and though when you come, I shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, I doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off, and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither every day in the year, when the weather would permit; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said,—“Oh! that our garden opened into this grove, or into this wilderness! for we are fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time enough to enjoy them.” Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo* stares you in the face. Would I could do so just at this moment!—We have three or four other walks, which are

¹ The common overgrown with fern, and rough
With pockly goss.

all pleasant in their way; but, except one, they all lie at such a distance as you would find heinously incommodious. But Weston, as I said before, is our favourite: of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was, indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise: but the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses on this melancholy occasion, which, though they have been printed, I dare say you never saw. When you come, therefore, you shall see them; but, as I told you in my last, not before. No, my dear, not a moment sooner; and for the reason in my last given I shall disobey your mandate with respect to those of F. Hill; and for another reason also:—if I copy them, they will occupy all the rest of my paper, which I cannot spare; and if I enclose the original, I must send my Packet to Palace Yard, and you finding that the postman passed your door without dropping a letter from me would conclude that I had neglected to write; and I will not incur such a suspicion in your mind for a moment. . . .

Farewell. Yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 9, 1785.

. . . I told you, I believe, that the spinney has been cut down; and, though it may seem sufficient to have mentioned such an occurrence once, I cannot help recurring to the melancholy theme. Last night, at near nine o'clock, we entered it for the first time this summer. We had not walked many yards in it, before we perceived that this pleasant retreat is destined never to be a pleasant retreat again. In one more year, the whole will be a thicket. That which was once the serpentine walk is now in a state of transformation, and is already become as woody as the rest. Poplars and elms without number are springing in the turf. They are now as high as the knee. Before the summer is ended, they will be twice as high; and the growth of another season will make them trees. It will then be impossible for any

but a sportsman and his dog to penetrate it. The desolation of the whole scene is such, that it sunk our spirits. The ponds are dry. The circular one, in front of the hermitage, is filled with flags and rushes; so that, if it contains any water, not a drop is visible. The weeping willow at the side of it, the only ornamental plant that has escaped the axe, is dead. The ivy and the moss, with which the hermitage was lined, are torn away; and the very mats that covered the benches have been stripped off, rent in tatters, and trodden under foot. So farewell, spinney; I have promised myself that I will never enter it again. We have both prayed in it: you for me, and I for you. But it is desecrated from this time forth, and the voice of prayer will be heard in it no more. The fate of it in this respect, however deplorable, is not peculiar. The spot where Jacob anointed his pillar, and, which is more apposite, the spot once honoured with the presence of Him who dwelt in the bush, have long since suffered similar disgrace, and are become common ground.

Yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCX.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 8, 1786.

. . . One evening last week Mrs. Unwin and I took our walk to Weston, and as we were returning through the grove opposite to the house, the Throckmortons presented themselves at the door. They are owners of a house at Weston, at present empty. It is a very good one, infinitely superior to ours. When we drank chocolate with them, they both expressed their ardent desire that we would take it, wishing to have us for nearer neighbours. If you, my cousin, were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered up all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever without danger of ejection; whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar,¹ who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slipper even in winter. A most unfortunate mistake was made by that gentleman's bailiff in his absence. Just before he left Weston last year for the winter, he gave him orders to cut short the tops of the flowering shrubs that lined a serpentine walk in a delightful

¹ Moses Browne, who resided in London.

grove, celebrated by my poetship in a little piece that you remember was called *The Shrubbery*.¹ The dunce, misapprehending the order, cut down and faggoted up the whole group, leaving neither tree, bush, nor twig,—nothing but stumps about as high as my ankle. Mrs. Throckmorton told us that she never saw her husband so angry in her life. I judge indeed by his physiognomy, which has great sweetness in it, that he is very little addicted to that infernal passion. But had he cudgelled the man for his cruel blunder, and the havoc made in consequence of it, I could have excused him. . . .

May God be ever with you, my beloved cousin!

W. C.

CCXI.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 29, 1786.

Thou dear, comfortable cousin, whose letters, among all that I receive, have this property peculiarly their own, that I expect them without trembling, and never find anything in them that does not give me pleasure; for which therefore I would take nothing in exchange that the world could give me, save and except that for which I must exchange them soon, (and happy shall I be to do so,) your own company. That, indeed, is delayed a little too long; to my impatience at least it seems so, who find the spring, backward as it is, too forward, because many of its beauties will have faded before you will have an opportunity to see them. We took our customary walk yesterday in the wilderness at Weston, and saw, with regret, the laburnums, syringas, and guelder-roses, some of them blown, and others just upon the point of blowing,² and could not help observing—all these will be gone before Lady Hesketh comes! Still, however, there will be roses, and jasmine, and honeysuckle, and shady walks, and cool alcoves, and you will partake them with us. But I want you to have a share of everything that is delightful here, and cannot bear that the advance of the season should steal away a single pleasure before you can come to enjoy it. . . .

The grass under my windows is all bespangled with dewdrops, and the birds are singing in the apple trees, among the blossoms.

¹ Beginning "O, happy shades! to me unblest."

² Laburnum rich
In streaming gold; syringa ivory-pure;
The scented and the scentless rose

The Task, VI. 149-51.

THE COUNTRYSIDE ROUND OLNEY 227

Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his Muse.

W. C.

CCXII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, July 28, 1788.

It is in vain that you tell me you have no talent at description, while in fact you describe better than any body. You have given me a most complete idea of your mansion and its situation; and I doubt not that with your letter in my hand by way of map, could I be set down on the spot in a moment, I should find myself qualified to take my walks and my pastime in whatever quarter of your paradise it should please me the most to visit. We also, as you know, have scenes at Weston worthy of description; but because you know them well, I will only say that one of them has, within these few days, been much improved; I mean the lime walk. By the help of the axe and the wood-bill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr. Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness, that no cathedral in the world can show one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure grounds have displaced without mercy, because, forsooth, they are rectilinear! It is a wonder that they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason. . . .

Ever thine,

W. C.

CCXIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, Sept. 13, 1788.

Beau seems to have objections against my writing to you this morning that are not to be overruled. He will be in my lap, licking my face, and nibbling the end of my pen. Perhaps he means to say, I beg you will give my love to her, which I therefore send you accordingly. There cannot be, this hindrance excepted, a situation more favourable to the business I have in hand than mine at this moment. Here is no noise, *save* (as the poets always express it) that of the birds hopping on their perches and playing with their wires, while the sun glimmering

through the elm opposite the window falls on my desk with all the softness of moonshine. There is not a cloud in the sky, nor a leaf that moves, so that over and above the enjoyment of the purest calm, I feel a well-warranted expectation that such as the day is, it will be to its end. This is the month in which such weather is to be expected, and which is therefore welcome to me beyond all others, October excepted, which promises to bring you hither. At your coming you will probably find us, and us only, or, to speak more properly, *us*. The Frogs, as I told you, hop into Norfolk soon, on a visit to Lord Petre, who, beside his palace in Essex, has another in that county. All the brothers are now at the Hall, *save* the physician, who is employed in prescribing medicine to the Welsh at Cardiff. There lives he with *madame son épouse*, with an income of three hundred pounds a year,—all happiness and contentment. The mother is also here; and here is also our uncle Gifford.—a man whom if you know you must love, and if you do not, I wish you did. But he goes this morning, and I expect every minute to see him pass my window. In volubility, variety, and earnestness of expression, he very much resembles your father, and in the sweetness of his temper too; so that though he be but a passenger, or rather a bird of passage, for his headquarters are in France, and he only flits occasionally to England, he has much engaged my affections. I walked with him yesterday on a visit to an oak on the borders of Yardley Chase, an oak which I often visit, and which is one of the wonders that I show to all who come this way, and have never seen it. I tell them all that it is a thousand years old,¹ verily believing it to be so, though I do not know it. A mile beyond this oak stands another, which has for time immemorial been known by the name of Judith, and is said to have been an oak when my namesake the Conqueror first came hither. And beside all this, there is a good coach-way to them both, and I design that you shall see them too. . . .

I am going this morning with the Dowager Frog to Chicheley, on a visit to the Chesters, which obliges me to shorten my scribble somewhat. Unless I finish my letter first you will not get it by this post. Therefore farewell, my dear: may God keep thee, and give us a joyful meeting—so pray we both, Amen.

Ever thine,

WM. C.

¹ A shattered veteran, hollow-trunked perhaps,
As now, and with excoriate forks deform,
Relics of ages.

4. “ORCHARD SIDE”

(LETTERS CCXIV.—CCXIX.)

In the same way, Cowper has familiarised us with “this incommodious nook,” of which he says: “the very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance” We share his delights in the greenhouse and “the boudoir,” or summer-house, “not much bigger than a sedan chair,” and smile with him at the “paralytic table,” victim of the too vigorous scrubbings by a merciless servant. Few of us were acquainted with the manifold uses of a card-table until they were pointed out by Cowper in one of his happiest letters. But the discomforts of the house were many, as the poet himself realises when he revisited the deserted dwelling shortly after his removal to Weston.

CCXIV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Aug 16, 1781

. . . I might date my letter from the greenhouse, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine anywhere except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children.¹ Not to mention the exchange of a sweet-smelling garden for the putrid exhalations of Silver End. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once adverting to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of havin

¹

The bay of curs
Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,
And infants clamorous whether pleased or pained.

The Task, I. 23c-2.

all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possible afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir,

WM. COWPER.

CCXV. to

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept 18, 1784.

Following your good example, I lay before me a sheet of my largest paper. It was this moment fair and unblemished, but I have begun to blot it, and having begun, am not likely to cease till I have spoiled it. I have sent you many a sheet that in my judgement of it has been very unworthy of your acceptance, but my conscience was in some measure satisfied by reflecting, that if it were good for nothing, at the same time it cost you

nothing, except the trouble of reading it. But the case is altered now. You must pay a solid price for frothy matter, and though I do not absolutely pick your pocket, yet you lose your money, and, as the saying is, are never the wiser; a saying literally fulfilled to the reader of my epistles.

My greenhouse¹ is never so pleasant as when we are just upon the point of being turned out of it. The gentleness of the autumnal suns, and the calmness of this latter season, make it a much more agreeable retreat than we ever find it in summer; when, the winds being generally brisk, we cannot cool it by admitting a sufficient quantity of air, without being at the same time incommoded by it. But now I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighbourhood resort to a bed of mignonette, opposite to the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which, though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets. All the sounds that Nature utters are delightful,—at least in this country. I should not perhaps find the roaring of lions in Africa, or of bears in Russia, very pleasing; but I know no beast in England whose voice I do not account musical, save and except always the braying of an ass. The notes of all our birds and fowls please me, without one exception. I should not indeed think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody, but a goose upon a common, or in a farmyard, is no bad performer; and as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles indeed of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble, to the bass of the humble bee, I admire them all. Seriously, however, it strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an exact accord has been contrived between his ear, and the sounds with which, at least in a rural situation, it is almost every moment visited. All the world is sensible of the uncomfortable effect that certain sounds have upon the nerves, and consequently upon the spirits:—and if a sinful world had been filled with such as would have curdled the blood, and have made the sense of hearing a perpetual inconvenience, I do not know that we

¹ Who loves a garden, loves a greenhouse too.

The Task, III. 566.

should have had a right to complain. But now the fields, the woods, the gardens, have each their concert, and the ear of man is for ever regaled by creatures who seem only to please themselves. Even the ears that are deaf to the Gospel, are continually entertained, though without knowing it, by sounds for which they are solely indebted to its Author. There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy, and as it is reasonable, and even scriptural, to suppose that there is music in Heaven, in those dismal regions perhaps the reverse of it is found; tones so dismal, as to make woe itself more insupportable, and to acuminate even despair. But my paper admonishes me in good time to draw the reins, and to check the descent of my fancy into deeps, with which she is but too familiar.

Our best love attends you both, with yours.

Sum ut semper, tui studiosissimus,

W. C.

CCXVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 19, 1785.

You will wonder, no doubt, when I tell you that I write upon a card-table; and will be still more surprised when I add that we breakfast, dine, sup, upon a card-table. In short, it serves all purposes, except the only one for which it was originally designed. The solution of this mystery shall follow, lest it should run in your head at a wrong time, and should puzzle you, perhaps, when you are on the point of ascending your pulpit, for I have heard you say, that at such seasons your mind is often troubled with impertinent intrusions. The round table, which we formerly had in use, was unequal to the pressure of my superincumbent breast and elbows. When I wrote upon it, it creaked and tilted, and by a variety of inconvenient tricks, disturbed the process. The fly-table was too slight and too small; the square dining-table, too heavy and too large, occupying, when its leaves were spread, almost the whole parlour; and the sideboard-table, having its station at too great a distance from the fire, and not being easily shifted out of its place and into it again, by reason of its size, was equally unfit for my repose. The card-table, therefore, which had for sixteen years been banished as mere lumber; the card-table, which is covered with green baize, and is, therefore, preferable to any other that has a slippery surface; the card-table, that stands firm and

never totters,—is advanced to the honour of assisting me upon my scribbling occasions; and, because we choose to avoid the trouble of making frequent changes in the position of our household furniture, proves equally serviceable upon all others. It has cost us now and then the downfall of a glass; for, when covered with a tablecloth, the fish-ponds are not easily discerned; and not being seen, are sometimes as little thought of. But having numerous good qualities which abundantly compensate that single inconvenience, we spill upon it our coffee, our wine, and our ale, without murmuring, and resolve that it shall be our table still, to the exclusion of all others. Not to be tedious, I will add but one more circumstance upon the subject, and that only because it will impress upon you, as much as anything that I have said, a sense of the value we set upon its escritorial capacity. Parched and penetrated on one side by the heat of the fire, it has opened into a large fissure, which pervades not the moulding of it only, but the very substance of the plank. At the mouth of this aperture, a sharp splinter presents itself, which, as sure as it comes in contact with a gown or an apron, tears it. It happens, unfortunately, to be on that side of this excellent and never-to-be-forgotten table which Mrs. Unwin sweeps with her apparel, almost as often as she rises from her chair. The consequences need not, to use the fashionable phrase, be given in detail: but the needle sets all to rights; and the card-table still holds possession of its functions without a rival. . . .

I am yours, my dear friend, as usual,

WM. COWPER.

CCXVII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 25, 1785.

I write in a nook that I call my *Boudoir*. It is a summer-house not much bigger than a sedan chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honeysuckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary, now dead, as a smoking-room; and under my feet is a trap-door, which once covered a hole in the ground where he kept his bottles. At present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer-time, whether to my friends, or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion; for intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter

evenings at Olney. But (thanks to my *Boudoir*!) I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred. They acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it. . . .

W. C.

CCXVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Olney, Feb 9, 1786.

I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. . . . And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel,¹ the alcove,² the Ouse,³ and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present: but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises

¹ I call the low-roofed lodge the *peasant's nest*.

The Task, I. 227

² The summit gamed, behold the proud alcove
That crowns it!

The Task, I. 278.

³ The Ouse, dividing the well-watered land,
Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,
As bashful, yet impatient to be seen.

The Task, I. 323-5.

to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney. . . .

Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin.

W. C.

CCXIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 16, 1786.

. . . Once, since we left Olney, I had occasion to call at our old dwelling; and never did I see so forlorn and woeful a spectacle. Deserted of its inhabitants, it seemed as if it could never be dwelt in for ever. The coldness of it, the dreariness, and the dirt, made me think it no unapt resemblance of a soul that God has forsaken. While He dwelt in it, and manifested Himself there, He could create His own accommodations, and give it occasionally the appearance of a palace; but the moment He withdraws, and takes with Him all the furniture and embellishment of His graces, it becomes what it was before He entered it—the habitation of vermin, and the image of desolation. Sometimes I envy the living, but not much, or not long; for while they live, as we call it, they too are liable to desertion. But the dead who have died in the Lord, I envy always; for they, I take it for granted, can be no more forsaken.

This Babylon, however, that we have left behind us, ruinous as it is, the ceilings cracked and the walls crumbling, still finds some who covet it. A shoemaker and an alemonger have proposed themselves as joint candidates to succeed us. Some small difference between them and the landlord, on the subject of rent, has hitherto kept them out; but at last they will probably agree. In the meantime Mr. Raban prophesies its fall, and tells them that they will occupy it at the hazard of their lives, unless it be well propped before they enter it. We have not, therefore, left it much too soon; and this we knew before we migrated,

though the same prophet would never speak out, so long as only our heads were in danger. . . .

Adieu, my dear friend. Thanks for very fine oysters, and an excellent cocoa-nut, received yesterday. Our love attends you both.

Ever yours,
W. C.

P.S.—Nat. Gee, with a long face, asks me if I hear any news of his dividend.

5. "WESTON LODGE"

(LETTERS CCXX.—CCXXII.)

Situated in "one of the prettiest villages in England," and free from the "fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma" which impregnated the atmosphere of Olney, Weston Lodge was a much better residence for the poet than Orchard Side. The house, too, adjoined Weston Hall (it belonged, in fact, to the Throckmorton estate), so that Cowper was in closer touch with his Roman Catholic friends.

CCXX.

TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS¹

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston, Aug 9, 1791.

I never make a correspondent wait for an answer through idleness, or want of proper respect for him; but if I am silent it is because I am busy, or not well, or because I stay till something occurs, that may make my letter at least a little better than mere blank paper. I therefore write speedily in reply to yours, being at present neither much occupied, nor at all indisposed, nor forbidden by a dearth of materials.

I wish always when I have a new piece in hand to be as secret as you, and there was a time when I could be so. Then I lived the life of a solitary, was not visited by a single neighbour, because I had none with whom I could associate; nor ever had an inmate. This was when I dwelt at Olney; but since I have removed to Weston the case is different. Here I am visited by all around me, and study in a room exposed to all manner of inroad.² It is on the ground floor, the room in which we dine, and which I am sure to be found by all who seek me. They³ throng generally at my desk, and with my work, whatever it Now unless perhaps I have conjured it into its hiding-
As be

¹ per who later became Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

place before they have had time to enter. This, however, is not always the case, and consequently, sooner or later, I cannot fail to be detected. Possibly you, who I suppose have a snug study, would find it impracticable to attend to any thing closely in an apartment exposed as mine; but use has made it familiar to me, and so familiar, that neither servants going and coming disconcert me; nor even if a lady, with an oblique glance of her eye, catches two or three lines of my MS., do I feel myself inclined to blush, though naturally the shyest of mankind. . . .

W. C.

CCXXI.

TO THE REV. JOHN JOHNSON

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,

Weston, Sept. 6, 1793.

To do a kind thing, and in a kind manner, is a double kindness, and no man is more addicted to both than you, or more skilful in contriving them. Your plan to surprise me agreeably succeeded to admiration. It was only the day before yesterday that, while we walked after dinner in the orchard, Mrs. Unwin between Sam and me, hearing the hall-clock, I observed a great difference between that and ours, and began immediately to lament, as I had often done, that there was not a sundial in all Weston to ascertain the true time for us. My complaint was long, and lasted till having turned into the grass walk, we reached the new building at the end of it; where we sat awhile and reposed ourselves. In a few minutes we returned by the way we came, when what think you was my astonishment to see what I had not seen before, though I had passed close by it, a smart sundial mounted on a smart stone pedestal! I assure you it seemed the effect of conjuration. I stopped short, and exclaimed,—“Why, here is a sundial, and upon our ground! How is this? Tell me, Sam, how came it here? Do you know any thing about it?” At first I really thought (that is to say, as soon as I could think at all) that this fac-totum of mine, Sam Roberts, having often heard me deplore the want of one, had given orders for the supply of that want himself, without my knowledge, and was half pleased and half offended. But he soon exculpated himself by imputing the fact to you. It was brought up to Weston (it seems) about noon: but Andrews stopped the cart at the blacksmith’s, whence he sent to inquire if I was gone for my walk. As it happened, I walked not till two o’clock. So there it stood waiting till I should go forth, and was introduced before my return. Fortunately too I went out at the

church end of the village, and consequently saw nothing of it. How I could possibly pass it without seeing it, when it stood in the walk, I know not, but it is certain that I did. And where I shall fix it now, I know as little. It cannot stand between the two gates, the place of your choice, as I understand from Samuel, because the hay-cart must pass that way in the season. But we are now busy in winding the walk all round the orchard, and in doing so shall doubtless stumble at last upon some open spot that will suit it.

There it shall stand, while I live, a constant monument of your kindness. . . .

It is ten o'clock, and I must breakfast. Adieu, therefore, my dear Johnny! Remember your appointment to see us in October.

Ever yours,

W. C.

CCXXII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Nov. 5, 1793.

In a letter from Lady Hesketh, which I received not long since, she informed me how very pleasantly she had spent some time at Wargrave. We now begin to expect her here, where our charms of situation are perhaps not equal to yours, yet by no means contemptible. She told me she had spoken to you in very handsome terms of the country round about us, but not so of our house, and the view before. The house itself, however, is not unworthy some commendation; small as it is, it is neat, and neater than she is aware of; for my study and the room over it have been repaired and beautified this summer, and little more was wanting to make it an abode sufficiently commodious for a man of my moderate desires. As to the prospect from it, that she misrepresented strangely, as I hope soon to have an opportunity to convince her by ocular demonstration. She told you, I know, of certain cottages opposite to us, or rather she described them as poor houses and hovels that effectually blind our windows. But none such exist. On the contrary, the opposite object, and the only one, is an orchard, so well planted, and with trees of such growth, that we seem to look into a wood, or rather to be surrounded by one. Thus, placed as we are in the midst of a village, we have none of the disagreeables that belong to such a position, and the village itself is one of the prettiest I know; terminated at one end by the church tower, seen through trees, and at the other, by a

very handsome gateway, opening into a fine grove of elms, belonging to our neighbour Courtenay.¹ How happy should I be to show it instead of describing it to you!

Adieu, my dear friend,

W. C.

6. HOUSE-HUNTING

(LETTERS CCXXIII.—CCXXV.)

The next three letters refer to the preparations made to receive Lady Hesketh upon her first visit to Olney.

CCXXIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

March 29, 1786.

Animated by the hope that, if you could be furnished with an abode in Olney, you might possibly make it in some sort the place of your residence, at least in the summer season, Mrs. Unwin and I have talked, thought, and inquired to the very bottom of that subject, and have been constantly occupied in it, ever since the receipt of your dear letter, which contains nothing but what is comfortable, and which contains some encouragement of an expectation that is more comfortable than all the rest. Olney, you are to understand, though much improved since our first acquaintance with it, is rather a poor town, and contains but one house except our own, that is not occupied by a trade, and that one is by no means to be got at. But we are just now come home after having taken an exact survey of such a one as is in many respects the very thing we wish, though not in all. It has what may fairly be called in the country, a very good parlour, and very neatly furnished. Over it is a very good chamber, large and in good order; and in it a *very good bed*. It has also a kitchen, roomy enough, with a good fireplace close to a good sash window, and I believe in all respects commodious. There is also a very pretty garden, that has been famous in Olney these many years, for its neatness and smartness; and therein is a root-house, which will be at your service and where you may drink tea if you choose it. It is so situated that you may walk into the country in three different directions, without having any part of the town to traverse. The rooms that you will occupy are all well sashed; the parlour window

¹ George Throckmorton had changed his name to Courtenay when he succeeded his brother John at Weston Hall

and the chamber window are both Venetian. The people themselves are very honest, sober, elderly folks, and quite respectable. They carry on a trade, but a very neat and silent one;—they are dealers in lace. The house has a modern face, and was rebuilt but a short time before we came to Olney. For these accommodations they ask twenty pounds a year. All this, my dear, is well, and pleases us at the heart. But now comes a difficulty; servants must be provided for, and how shall we find room for them? Adjoining to your chamber, for so I call it, I hope, prophetically, is a very decent room in which your own maid might repose herself to her wish. But then there is an apprentice in the case who at present has possession of it, for whom, while he stays, there is no other; and of whose departure there is no hope till the end of August. One of the maids might sleep with the maid of the house, if she has no objection to it; but the room that I have just mentioned is the only spare servant's-room that the house affords. It might possibly be easy to find lodging for two servants at no great distance,—perhaps at the next door, but your own woman should certainly be within call. Thus stands the case, my beloved cousin. But you will come, and you will see it all with your own eyes, and then we shall be able to remedy any defects better than we can without you. Do like it if you can. I should tell you that the situation is such that you will never be troubled with an afternoon or evening sun. It is within five minutes' walk of our door. There is not in Olney, nor in all the neighbourhood of Olney, a ready-furnished house or lodging to be found besides. As to the rooms once occupied by Lady Austen, they are, alas! out of the question. She furnished them herself, and at present the walls are bare. They are in the vicarage, which at that time was occupied by curate, wife, and family. But that curate¹ has removed to London, and now preaches at the Lock²; and the present one is a single man, and has not, I suppose, much more furniture than the Shunamite bestowed upon Elisha when she lodged him on the wall of her house. We have learned, however, on inquiry, that two rooms excepted, the whole is vacant. The house that I have described, as far as parlour, chamber, and kitchen are concerned, is so exactly the thing that I think would suit you, that neither I nor Mrs. Unwin can help cherishing a hope that some way or other matters may be made to fadge. . . .

Adieu, my ever beloved.

WM. COWPER.

¹ The Rev. T. Scott.

² The Lock Hospital.

See what habit has done, it has made me skip over the middle of the page without occasion. But I have two or three things in reserve that will fill it sufficiently. First for my health. . . . I boasted that I was growing fat, but I may now boast that I am grown lean, which at my time of life is perhaps the prouder boast of the two. There is no better air in the world than the air of Olney in summer-time. The whole country is either rock or gravel at the depth of a few feet. But in the winter I suspect that it is rather agueish, for such distempers are very frequent here at that season; not that we rich rogues are ever so affected, the evil is confined merely to the poor. But we are built on the river's brink, and in the winter the adjoining meadows are often laid under water, which is, I suppose, the cause of it. I send you all that I have to send in the complimentary style. . . . I could add, but want room.

Good-bye, neighbour.

CCXXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

Monday, April 10, 1786.

. . . We are this moment returned from the house above mentioned. The parlour is small and neat, not a mere cupboard, but very passable: the chamber is better, and quite smart. There is a little room close to your own for Mrs. Eaton, and there is room for Cooke and Samuel. The terms are half a guinea a week; but it seems as if we were never to take a step without a stumble. The kitchen is bad,—it has, indeed, never been used except as a washhouse; for people at Olney do not eat and drink as they do in other places. I do not mean, my dear, that they quaff nectar or feed on ambrosia, but *tout au contraire*. So what must be done about this abominable kitchen? It is out of doors: that is not amiss. It has neither range nor jack: that is terrible. But then range and jack are not unattainables; they may be easily supplied. And if it were not—abominable kitchen that it is, no bigger than half an egg-shell, shift might be made. The good woman is content that your servants should eat and drink in her parlour, but expects that they shall disperse themselves when they have done. But whither, who can say? unless into the arbour in the garden, for that they should solace themselves in said kitchen were hardly to be expected. While I write this, Mrs. U. is gone to attempt a treaty with the linendraper over the way, which, if she succeeds, will be best of all, because the rooms are better, and it is just at hand. I must halt till she returns.—She returns;—nothing done.

She is gone again to another place. Once more I halt. Again she returns and opens the parlour door with these tidings:—"I have succeeded beyond my utmost hopes. I went to Maurice Smith's, (he, you must know, my dear, is a Jack-of-all-trades;) I said, do you know if Mr. Brightman could and would let lodgings ready furnished to a lady with three servants? Maurice's wife calls out, (she is a Quaker,) 'Why dost thee not take the vicarage?' I replied, There is no furniture. 'Pshaw!' quoth Maurice's wife; 'we will furnish it for thee, and at the lowest rate:—from a bed to a platter we will find all.'"—"And what do you intend now?" said I to Mrs. Unwin. "Why now," quoth she, "I am going to the curate to hear what *he* says." So away she goes, and in about twenty minutes returns.—"Well, now it is all settled. Lady H. is to have all the vicarage, except two rooms, at the rate of ten guineas a year; and Maurice will furnish it for five guineas from June to November, inclusive." So, my dear, you and your train are provided for to my heart's content. They are Lady Austen's lodgings, only with more room, and at the same price. You have a parlour sixteen feet by fourteen, chamber ditto; a room for your own maid, near to your own, that I have occupied many a good time; an exceeding good garret for Cooke, and another ditto, at a convenient distance, for Samuel; a cellar, a good kitchen, the use of the garden;—in short, all that you can want. Give us our commission in your next, and all shall be ready by the first of June. You will observe, my beloved cousin, that it is not in all above eight shillings a week in the whole year, or but a trifle more. And the furniture is really smart, and the beds good. But you must find your own linen. Come then, my beloved cousin, for I am determined that, whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be *Vicar* of Olney. Come and cheer my heart. I have left many things unsaid, but shall note them another time. Adieu!

Ever yours,

W. C.

CCXXV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Olney, April 17, 1786.

If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest cousin, I will. He says, and as beautiful as truly—"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!" I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay.

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden, but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour, nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door opening out of our garden affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the round-about by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber-windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge, described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a distance. Should you wish for books at Olney, you must bring them with you, or you will wish in vain, for I have none but the works of a certain poet, Cowper, of whom perhaps you have heard, and they are as yet but two volumes. They may multiply hereafter; but at present they are no more.

You are the first person for whom I have heard Mrs. Unwin express such feelings as she does for you. She is not profuse in professions, nor forward to enter into treaties of friendship with new faces; but when her friendship is once engaged, it may be confided in even unto death. She loves you already, and how much more will she love you before this time twelvemonth! I have indeed endeavoured to describe you to her, but perfectly as I have you by heart, I am sensible that my picture cannot do you justice. I never saw one that did. Be you what you may, you are much beloved, and will be so at Olney, and Mrs. U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent, dear relation; that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections. . . .

Yours, my dear friend and cousin,

W. C.

7. LOCAL NEWS

(LETTERS CCXXVI.—CCXXX.)

Apologising on one occasion to Joseph Hill for "so empty an epistle," Cowper remarked: "If Olney furnished anything for your amusement, you should have it in return, but occurrences here are as rare as cucumbers at Christmas." When, however, there *was* an unusual event, Cowper could describe it in that inimitable manner that has given him his foremost place among English letter-writers.

CCXXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 18, 1778.

I hurry you into the midst of things at once, which if it be not much in the epistolary style, is acknowledged, however, to be very sublime. Mr. Morley, videlicet the grocer, is guilty of much neglect and carelessness, and has lately so much disappointed your mother, that she is at last obliged to leave him, and begs you will send her Mr. Rawlinson's address, that she may transfer her custom to him. She adds, moreover, that she was well aware of the unseasonableness of salmon at this time, and did not mean that you should order any to Olney till the spring.

We are indebted to you for your political intelligence, but have it not in our power to pay you in kind. Proceed, however, to give us such information as cannot be learned from the newspaper; and when anything arises at Olney, that is not in the threadbare style of daily occurrences, you shall hear of it in return. Nothing of this sort has happened lately, except that a lion was imported here at the fair, seventy years of age, and was as tame as a goose. Your mother and I saw him embrace his keeper with his paws, and lick his face. Others saw him receive his head in his mouth, and restore it to him again unhurt;—a sight we chose not to be favoured with, but rather advised the honest man to discontinue the practice,—a practice hardly reconcileable to prudence, unless he had a head to spare. The beast, however, was a very magnificent one, and much more royal in his appearance than those I have seen in the Tower. . . .

Your mother joins me in affectionate respects—I should have said in love, to yourself, Mrs. Unwin, Miss Shuttleworth, and ~~little~~ John. If you will accept this for a letter, perhaps I may be able to furnish you with more such upon occasion.

Yours, with thanks for your last,

WM. COWPER.

CCXXVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

April 27, 1782.

A part of Lord Harrington's new-raised corps have taken up their quarters at Olney since you left us. They have the regimental music with them. The men have been drawn up this morning upon the Market-hill, and a concert, such as we have not heard these many years, has been performed at no great distance from our window. Your mother and I both thrust our heads into the coldest east wind that ever blew in April, that we might hear them to greater advantage. The band acquitted themselves with taste and propriety, not *blairing*, like trumpeters at a fair, but producing gentle and elegant symphony, such as charmed our ears, and convinced us that no length of time can wear out a taste for harmony; and that though plays, balls, and masquerades have lost all their power to please us, and we should find them not only insipid but insupportable, yet sweet music is sure to find a corresponding faculty in the soul; a sensibility that lives to the last, which even religion itself does not extinguish. I must pity therefore some good people, (at least some who once were thought such,) who have been fiddled out of all their Christian profession; and having forsaken the world for a time, have danced into it again with all their might. It is a snare from which I myself should find it difficult to escape, were I much in the way of it. . . .

Our love attends yourself and Mrs. Unwin, John the hider of a tea-kettle not yet found, and your hosts at Dewsbury.

Yours ever,

W. C.

CCXXVIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 13, 1783.

I am, and always have been, a great observer of natural appearances, but I think not a superstitious one. The fallibility of those speculations which lead men of fanciful minds to interpret Scripture by the contingencies of the day, is evident from this consideration, that what the God of the Scriptures has seen fit to conceal, He will not as the God of Nature publish. He is one and the same in both capacities, and consistent with Himself; and His purpose, if He designs a secret, impenetrable, in whatever way we attempt to open it. It is impossible, however, for an observer of natural phenomena not to be struck with the

singularity of the present season. The fogs I mentioned in my last still continue, though till yesterday the earth was as dry as intense heat could make it. The sun continues to rise and set without his rays, and hardly shines at noon, even in a cloudless sky. At eleven last night the moon was a dull red; she was nearly at her highest elevation, and had the colour of heated brick. She would naturally, I know, have such an appearance looking through a misty atmosphere: but that such an atmosphere should obtain for so long a time, and in a country where it has not happened in my remembrance even in the winter, is rather remarkable. We have had more thunderstorms than have consisted well with the peace of the fearful maidens in¹ Olney, though not so many as have happened in places at no great distance, nor so violent. Yesterday morning, however, at seven o'clock, two fire-balls burst either in the steeple or close to it. William Andrews saw them meet at that point, and immediately after saw such a smoke issue from the apertures in the steeple as soon rendered it invisible. I believe no very material damage happened, though when Joe Green went afterwards to wind the clock, flakes of stone and lumps of mortar fell about his ears in such abundance, that he desisted, and fled terrified. The noise of the explosion surpassed all the noises I ever heard;—you would have thought that a thousand sledge-hammers were battering great stones to powder, all in the same instant. The weather is still as hot, and the air as full of vapour, as if there had been neither rain nor thunder all the summer. . . .

Dead ducks cannot travel this weather; they say it is too hot for them, and they shall stink.

Yours and yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCXXIX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Nov. 10, 1783.

. . . Last Saturday sc'nnight, the moment I had composed myself in my bed, your mother too having just got into hers, we were alarmed by a cry of fire on the staircase. I immediately rose, and saw sheets of flame above the roof of Mr. Palmer's house, our opposite neighbour. The mischief, however, was not so ~~near~~ to him as it seemed to be, having begun in a butcher's yard, at a little distance. We made all haste down stairs, and soon threw open the street door, for the reception of as much lumber, of all sorts, as our house would hold, brought into it

by several who thought it necessary to move their furniture. In two hours' time we had so much that we could hold no more, even the uninhabited part of our building being filled. Not that we ourselves were entirely secure—an adjoining thatch, on which fell showers of sparks, being rather a dangerous neighbour. Providentially, however, the night was perfectly calm, and we escaped. By four in the morning it was extinguished, having consumed many out-buildings, but no dwelling-house. Your mother suffered a little in her health, from the fatigue and bustle of the night, but soon recovered. As for me, it hurt me not. The slightest wind would have carried the fire to the very extremity of the town, there being multitudes of thatched buildings and faggot-piles so near to each other, that they must have proved infallible conductors.

The balloons prosper: and I congratulate you upon it. Thanks to Montgolfier, we shall fly at last.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCXXX.

TO MRS. COURTENAY

Weston, Aug. 20, 1793

My dearest Catharina is too reasonable, I know, to expect news from me, who live on the outside of the world, and know nothing that passes within it. The best news is, that though you are gone, you are not gone for ever, as once I supposed you were, and said that we should probably meet no more. Some news however we have; but then I conclude that you have already received it from the Doctor, and that thought almost deprives me of all courage to relate it. On the evening of the feast, Bob Archer's house affording I suppose the best room for the purpose, all the lads and lasses, who felt themselves disposed to dance, assembled there. Long time they danced, at least long time they did something a little like it; when at last the company having retired, the fiddler asked Bob for a lodging. Bob replied—"that his beds were all full of his own family, but if he chose it he would show him a haycock, where he might sleep as sound as in any bed whatever."—So forth they went together, and when they reached the place, the fiddler knocked down Bob, and demanded his money. But happily for Bob, though he might be knocked down, and actually was so, yet he could not possibly be robbed, having nothing. The fiddler therefore having amused himself with kicking him and beating him as he lay, as long as he saw

good, left him, and has never been heard of since, nor inquired after indeed, being no doubt the last man in the world whom Bob wishes to see again. . . .

Adieu, my dearest Catharina. Give my best love to your husband. Come home as soon as you can, and accept our united very best wishes.

W. C.

VII. COWPER'S RURAL OCCUPATIONS

(LETTERS *CCXXXI-CCXXXVIII.)

Cowper had always loved a garden. When he lived in the Temple, he purchased myrtles from Covent Garden practically every year, and he took to gardening when he settled down with the Unwins. "Having commenced gardening, I study the arts of pruning, sowing and planting; and enterprise everything in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in; and were we twenty miles nearer London I might turn higgler, and serve your honour [Joseph Hill] with cauliflowers and broccoli at the best hand." As a handyman he was not to be despised. "the necessity of amusement [has] made me a carpenter, a birdcage-maker and a gardener," and he naively remarks elsewhere that "there is not a squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages than myself." He was very proud of his successful attempt "to cheat the glazier" by constructing his own greenhouse, "which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back and walk away with." His friends wisely encouraged him in these healthy occupations that kept his mind from soul-tormenting thoughts.

CCXXXI.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

March 14, 1767

I just add a line by way of postscript to my last, to apprise you of the arrival of a very dear friend of mine at the Park on Friday next, the son of Mr. Unwin, whom I have desired to call on you, in his way from London to Huntingdon. If you knew him as well as I do, you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me, and knows my *whole story*, from first to last. I give you this previous notice, because I know you are not fond of strange faces, and because I thought it would in some degree save him the pain of announcing himself.

I am become a great florist, and shrub-doctor. If the Major can make up a small packet of seeds, that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honey-suckle; such a packet I mean as may be put in one's fob. I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such, however, as require

great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare. . . .

W. C.

CCXXXII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 3, 1778.

. . . I made Mr. Wright's gardener a present of fifty sorts of stove plant seeds; in return, he has presented me with six fruiting pines, which I have put into a bark bed, where they thrive at present as well as I could wish. If they produce good fruit, you will stand some little chance to partake of them. But you must not expect giants, for being transplanted in December will certainly give them a check, and probably diminish their size. He has promised to supply me with still better plants in October, which is the proper season for moving them, and with a reinforcement every succeeding year. Mrs. Hill sent me the seeds; which perhaps could not have been purchased for less than three guineas. 'Tis thus we great gardeners establish a beneficial intercourse with each other, and furnish ourselves with valuable things that, therefore, cost us nothing.

How did you escape the storm? It did us no damage, except keeping us awake, and giving your mother the headache; and except—what can hardly be called a damage, lifting a long and heavy palisade from the top of our garden wall, and setting it so gently down upon two old hot-beds, that it was not at all broken or impaired.

Your mother is well at present, and sends her love, joining with me, at the same time, in affectionate remembrances to all the family.

Yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCXXXIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 26, 1779

I must beg your assistance in a design I have formed to cheat the glazier. Government has laid a tax upon glass, and he has trebled it. I want as much as will serve for a large frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will inquire at a glass-manufacturer's how he sells his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me this information, and at the same time the manufacturer's address, I will execute

the rest of the business myself, without giving you any farther trouble. . . .

Your mother sends her love and affectionate remembrance to all at Stock, from the tallest to the shortest there, in which she is accompanied by yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCXXXIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Amico Mio,

Sept. 21, 1779

Be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames¹ designed to receive my pine plants; but I cannot mend the kitchen windows, till by the help of that implement I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber I should be a complete glazier; and possibly the happy time may come, when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, "that he had found the Emilius who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea." I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place.

I have eight pair of tame pigeons. When I first enter the garden in a morning, I find them perched upon the wall, waiting for their breakfast; for I feed them always upon the gravel-walk. If your wish should be accomplished, and you should find yourself furnished with the wings of a dove, I shall undoubtedly find you amongst them. Only be so good, if that should be the case, to announce yourself by some means or other. For I imagine your crop will require something better than tares to fill ~~it~~.

Your mother and I last week made a trip in a post-chaise

¹ The uplifted frame compact at every joint,
And overlaid with clear translucent glass.

to Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, about four miles off. He understood that I did not much affect strange faces, and sent over his servant on purpose to inform me that he was going into Leicestershire, and that if I chose to see the gardens, I might gratify myself without danger of seeing the proprietor. I accepted the invitation, and was delighted with all I found there. The situation is happy, the gardens elegantly disposed, the hot-house in the most flourishing state, and the orange trees the most captivating creatures of the kind I ever saw. A man, in short, had need have the talents of Cox or Langford, the auctioneers, to do the whole scene justice.

Our love attends you all.

Yours,

W. C.

CCXXXV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 6, 1786.

. . . I am obliged to you for what you said upon the subject of book-buying, and am very fond of availing myself of another man's pocket, when I can do it creditably to myself, and without injury to him. Amusements are necessary, in a retirement like mine, especially in such a state of mind as I labour under. The necessity of amusement makes me sometimes write verses; it made me a carpenter, a birdcage maker, a gardener; and has lately taught me to draw, and to draw too with such surprising proficiency in the art, considering my total ignorance of it two months ago, that when I show your mother my productions, she is all admiration and applause.

You need never fear the communication of what you entrust to us in confidence. You know your mother's delicacy in this point sufficiently; and as for me, I once wrote a *Connoisseur* upon the subject of secret-keeping, and from that day to this I believe I have never divulged one.

Believe me yours, with the customary, but not therefore unmeaning addition of love to all under your roof. Your mother sends hers, which being maternal, is put up in a separate parcel.

W. C.

CCXXXVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

DEAR SIR,

May 3, 1786.

You indulge me in such a variety of subjects, and allow me such a latitude of excursion in this scribbling employment,

that I have no excuse for silence. I am much obliged to you for swallowing such boluses as I send you for the sake of my gilding, and verily believe that I am the only man alive, from whom they would be welcome to a palate like yours. I wish I could make them more splendid than they are, more alluring to the eye, at least, if not more pleasing to the taste; but my leaf gold is tarnished, and has received such a tinge from the vapours that are ever brooding over my mind, that I think it no small proof of your partiality to me, that you will read my letters. I am not fond of longwinded metaphors; I have always observed, that they halt at the latter end of their progress, and so do mine. I deal much in ink indeed, but not such ink as is employed by poets, and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks, and dab-chicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them; and her praise, and my praise put together, are fame enough for me. O! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being upon earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years, there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not an unawakened one could be found from the arctic to the antarctic circle. At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the earth—what are the planets—what is the sun itself but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, “The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!”¹ Their eyes have never been opened, to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute’s gardener could take upon his back, and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to

And smiling say, “My father made them all.”

The Task, V. 747.

myself—"This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon."

W. C.

CCXXXVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 1, 1782.

. . . I have sowed sallad, in hopes that you will eat it; I have already cut cucumbers,¹ but have no fruit growing at present. Spring onions in abundance. We shall be happy to see you, and hope that nothing will intervene to shorten your stay with us. Our love is with you both, and with all your family. *Bon voyage!*

Yours,

WM. COWPER.

If your short stay in town will afford you an opportunity, I should be glad if you would buy me a genteelish toothpick case. I shall not think half a guinea too much for it; only it must be one that will not easily break. If second-hand, perhaps, it may be the better.

CCXXXVIII.

TO MRS. KING

MY DEAR MADAM,

Weston Underwood, Oct. 11, 1788.

You are perfectly secure from all danger of being overwhelmed with presents from me. It is not much that a poet can possibly have it in his power to give. When he has presented his own works, he may be supposed to have exhausted all means of donation. They are his only superfluity. There was a time, but that time was before I commenced writer for the press, when I amused myself in a way somewhat similar to yours; allowing, I mean, for the difference between masculine and female operations. The scissors and the needle are your chief implements; mine were the chisel and the saw. In those days you might have been in some danger of too plentiful a return for your favours. Tables, such as they were, and joint-stools such as never were, might have travelled to Pertenhall in most inconvenient abundance. But I have long since discontinued this practice, and many others which I found it necessary to adopt, that I might escape

¹ The ambition of one meaner far, whose powers . . .
Pant for the praise of dressing to the taste
Of critic appetite, no sordid fare,
A cucumber

the worst of all evils, both in itself and its consequences—an idle life. Many arts I have exercised with this view, for which Nature never designed me; though among them were some in which I arrived at considerable proficiency, by mere dint of the most heroic perseverance. There is not a squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself; and in the article of cabbage-nets, I had no superior. I even had the hardiness to take in hand the pencil, and studied a whole year the art of drawing. Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had, at least, the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice; for I actually produced three landscapes, which a lady thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired. But gardening¹ was, of all employments, that in which I succeeded best; though even in this I did not suddenly attain perfection. I began with lettuces and cauliflowers: from them I proceeded to cucumbers; next to melons. I then purchased an orange-tree, to which, in due time, I added two or three myrtles. These served me day and night with employment during a whole severe winter. To defend them from the frost, in a situation that exposed them to its severity, cost me much ingenuity and much attendance. I contrived to give them a fire heat; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers, lest the frost should seize them before morning. Very minute beginnings have sometimes important consequences. From nursing two or three little evergreens, I became ambitious of a greenhouse, and accordingly built one; which, verse excepted, afforded me amusement for a longer time than any expedient of all the many to which I have fled for refuge from the misery of having nothing to do. When I left Olney for Weston, I could no longer have a greenhouse of my own; but in a neighbour's garden I find a better, of which the sole management is consigned to me.

¹ Or if the garden with its many cares
All well repaid, demand him, he attends
The welcome call.

I had need take care, when I begin a letter, that the subject with which I set off be of some importance; for before I can exhaust it, be it what it may, I have generally filled my paper. But self is a subject inexhaustible, which is the reason that though I have said little, and nothing, I am afraid, worth your hearing, I have only room to add, that I am, my dear Madam,

Most truly yours,

W. C.

Mrs. Unwin bids me present her best compliments, and say how much she shall be obliged to you for the receipt to make that most excellent cake which came hither in its native pan. There is no production of yours that will not be always most welcome at Weston.

VIII THE LOVER OF NATURE

(LETTERS CCXXXIX.-CCXLIV.)

Invoking Mary Unwin, "the dear companion of my walks," the poet writes:

"Thou knowest my praise of nature most sincere,
And that my raptures are not conjured up
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
But genuine."

The Task, I. 150-3

And it is this love of Nature, this power of graphically and faithfully depicting the scenes and objects with which he was in daily communion that made Cowper so important a figure in the Romantic Revival.

His letters reveal the same devoted admiration of Nature in nearly all her moods and forms. "Everything I see in the fields is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure" Elsewhere he remarks: "The most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep," and he was "especially an admirer of thunder rolling over the great waters." But the wild and desolate landscapes of the Ossianic type made no appeal to him: "The cultivated appearance of Weston suits my frame far better than wild hills that aspire to be mountains, covered with vast unfrequented woods"

CCXXXIX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 26, 1781.

I may, I suppose, congratulate you on your safe arrival at Brighthelmstone; and am the better pleased with your design to close the summer there, because I am acquainted with the place, and, by the assistance of fancy, can without much difficulty join myself to the party, and partake with you in your amusements and excursions. It happened singularly enough, that just before I received your last, in which you apprise me of your intended journey, I had been writing upon the subject, having found occasion towards the close of my last poem, called *Retirement*, to take some notice of the modern passion for seaside entertainments,¹ and to direct to the means by which they might be made useful as well as agreeable. I think with you, that the most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep; and cannot but feel an unpolite species of astonishment, when I consider the multitudes that view it without emotion, and even

¹ And all, impatient of dry land, agree
With one consent to rush into the sea.

Retirement, 523-4.

without reflection. In all its various forms, it is an object of all others the most suited to affect us with lasting impressions of the awful Power that created and controls it. I am the less inclined to think this negligence excusable, because, at a time of life when I gave as little attention to religious subjects as almost any man, I yet remember that the waves would preach to me, and that in the midst of dissipation I had an ear to hear them. One of Shakespeare's characters¹ says,—“I am never merry when I hear sweet music.” The same effect that harmony seems to have had upon him, I have experienced from the sight and sound of the ocean, which have often composed my thoughts into a melancholy not unpleasing nor without its use. So much for *Signor Nettuno*. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

CCXL.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY DEAR BULL,

Aug. 3, 1783

I began to despair of you as a correspondent, yet not to blame you for being silent. I am acquainted with Rottingdean and all its charms, the downs, the cliff, and the agreeable opportunities of sauntering that the seaside affords. I knew, besides, that your preachings would be frequent, and allowed an especial force above all to the consideration of your natural indolence; for though diligent and active in your business, you know in your heart that you love your ease, as all parsons do: these weighty causes all concurring to justify your silence, I should have been very unreasonable had I condemned it. . . .

I rejoice that the bathing has been of use to you; the more you wash the filthier may you be, that your days may be prolonged, and your health more established. Scratching is good exercise, promotes the circulation, elicits the humours, and if you will take a certain monarch's word, of itching memory, is too great a pleasure for a subject

I was always an admirer of thunder-torrens, even before I knew whose voice I heard in them, but especially an admirer of thunder rolling over the great waters² There is something

¹ Jessica, See the *Merchant of Venice*, Act V. . . .

² The rising waves obey the increasing blast,
Abrupt and horrid as the tempest roars,
Thunder and flash upon the steadfast shores,
Till he that rides the whirlwind checks the rein,
Then all the world of waters sleeps again

Retirement, 532-6.

singularly majestic in the sound of it at sea, where the eye and the ear have uninterrupted opportunity of observation, and the concavity above being made spacious reflects it with more advantage. I have consequently envied you your situation, and the enjoyment of those refreshing breezes that belong to it. We have indeed been regaled with some of these bursts of ethereal music.—The peals have been as loud, by the report of a gentleman who lived many years in the West Indies, as were ever heard in those islands, and the flashes as splendid. But when the thunder preaches, an horizon bounded by the ocean is the only sounding-board.

Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

CXXLI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Nov. 10, 1783.

. . . You ought not to have supposed that if you had visited us last summer, the pleasure of the interview would have been all your own. By such an imagination you wrong both yourself and us. Do you suppose we do not love you? You cannot suspect your mother of coldness; and as to me, assure yourself I have no friend in the world with whom I communicate without the least reserve, yourself excepted. Take heart then, and when you find a favourable opportunity to come, assure yourself of such a welcome from us both as you have a right to look for. But I have observed in your two last letters somewhat of a dejection and melancholy, that I am afraid you do not sufficiently strive against. I suspect you of being too sedentary. "You cannot walk." Why you cannot is best known to yourself. I am sure your legs are long enough, and your person does not overload them. But I beseech you ride, and ride often. I think I have heard you say, you cannot even do that without an object. Is not health an object? Is not a new prospect, which in most countries is gained at the end of every mile, an object? Assure yourself that easy chairs are no friends to cheerfulness, and that a long winter spent by the fireside is a prelude to an unhealthy spring. Everything I see in the fields is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure. This indeed is partly the effect of a natural taste for rural beauty, and partly the effect of habit; for I never in all my life have let slip the opportunity of breathing fresh air, and of conversing with Nature, when I could fairly

catch it. I earnestly recommend a cultivation of the same taste to you, suspecting that you have neglected it, and suffer for doing so. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

CCXLII.

TO MRS. KING

MY DEAR MADAM,

Weston, June 14, 1790.

I have hardly a scrap of paper belonging to me that is not scribbled over with blank verse; and taking out your letter from a bundle of others, this moment, I find it thus inscribed on the seal side:

—————meantime his steeds
Snorted, by Myrmidons detain'd, and loosed
From their own master's chariot, foam'd to fly.

You will easily guess to what they belong; and I mention the circumstance merely in proof of my perpetual engagement to Homer, whether at home or abroad; for when I committed these lines to the back of your letter, I was rambling at a considerable distance from home. I set one foot on a mole-hill, placed my hat with the crown upward on my knee, laid your letter upon it, and with a pencil wrote the fragment that I have sent you. In the same posture I have written many and many a passage of a work which I hope soon to have done with. . . .

I am, like you and Mr. King, an admirer of clouds, but only when there are blue intervals, and pretty wide ones too, between them. One cloud is too much for me, but a hundred are not too many. So with this riddle and with my best respects to Mr. King, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's to you both. I remain, my dear madam,

Truly yours,
W. C.

CCXLIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Oct. 18, 1792.

. . . I have neither been well myself, nor is Mrs. Unwin, though better, so much improved in her health, as not still to require my continual assistance. My disorder has been the old one, to which I have been subject so many years, and especially about this season,—a nervous fever; not, indeed, so oppressive as it has sometimes proved, but sufficiently alarming both to Mrs. Unwin and myself, and such as made it neither easy nor proper for me to make much use of my pen while it continued.

At present I am tolerably free from it—a blessing for which I believe myself partly indebted to the use of James's powder, in small quantities; and partly to a small quantity of laudanum, taken every night; but chiefly to a manifestation of God's presence vouchsafed to me a few days since; transient, indeed, and dimly seen, through a mist of many fears and troubles, but sufficient to convince me, at least while the enemy's power is a little restrained, that He has not cast me off for ever.

Our visit was a pleasant one,—as pleasant as Mrs. Unwin's weakness, and the state of my spirits, never very good, would allow. As to my own health, I never expected that it would be much improved by the journey; nor have I found it so. Some benefit, indeed, I hoped, and perhaps a little more than I found. But the season was, after the first fortnight, extremely unfavourable,—stormy and wet; and the prospects, though grand and magnificent, yet rather of a melancholy cast, and consequently not very propitious to me. The cultivated appearance of Weston suits my frame of mind far better than the wild hills that aspire to be mountains, covered with vast unfrequented woods, and here and there affording a peep between their summits at the distant ocean. Within doors all was hospitality and kindness, but the scenery *would* have its effect; and though delightful in the extreme to those who had spirits to bear it, was too gloomy for me.

Mrs. Unwin performed the journey, both going and returning, better than I had hoped she could. With an arm to lean upon she walks pretty well, though still with a step that totters when she turns; neither can she yet read without poring more than is good for her, or use her needles. But her looks are greatly improved, and her speech, especially in the earlier part of the day, is as strong and articulate as ever.

We are glad that the ducks arrived safe. A couple were likewise sent a little before our departure for Sussex, which we hope arrived safe also. I must now to breakfast;—and with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances and thanks for your kind mention of her in your letter, conclude myself yours,

My dear friend,

Most sincerely,

W. C.

CCXLIV.

TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston, Feb. 23, 1793

. . . Frogs will feed on worms. I saw a frog gathering into his gullet an earth-worm as long as himself; it cost him time and labour, but at last he succeeded.

Mrs. Unwin and I, crossing a brook, saw from the foot-bridge somewhat at the bottom of the water which had the appearance of a flower. Observing it attentively, we found that it consisted of a circular assemblage of minnows; their heads all met in a centre; and their tails diverging at equal distances, and being elevated above their heads, gave them the appearance of a flower half blown. One was longer than the rest; and as often as a straggler came in sight, he quitted his place to pursue him, and having driven him away, he returned to it again, no other minnow offering to take it in his absence. This we saw him do several times. The object that had attached them all was a dead minnow, which they seemed to be devouring.

After a very rainy day, I saw on one of the flower borders what seemed a long hair, but it had a waving, twining motion. Considering more nearly, I found it alive, and endued with spontaneity, but could not discover at the ends of it either head or tail, or any distinction of parts. I carried it into the house, when the air of a warm room dried and killed it presently.

W. C.

IX. THE ANIMAL LOVER

(LETTERS CCXLV.-CCLVI.)

Who can recall the poet without remembering his pets the three hares (Puss, Bess and Tney), his dogs, the intelligent Beau and the courageous Mungo, the playful tortoiseshell kitten, the pigeons, the goldfinches, and a host of others? Their adventures provided him with material for some of his finest occasional poems and most entertaining letters: the hue and cry after Puss, for example, is as droll in its way as John Gilpin's ride. Cowper joined with Burns and Goldsmith in appealing for humane treatment of dumb creatures in an age of brutality and indifference to the sufferings of those, "His meaner works," that.

"Are yet His care, and have an interest all,
All, in the universal Father's love."

The Task, VI. 448-9.

CCXLV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Olney, April 16, 1780

Since I wrote my last we have had a visit from ———. I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance, from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of. He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise, they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it; the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus upon theirs; neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears, during the whole visit. The birds, however, survived it, and so did we. They perhaps flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. ——— could have killed them both in another hour

W. C.

CCXLVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

August 21, 1780.

The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled, and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table, when it ceased. In about five minutes, a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite Puss¹ had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her, just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out, and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler, and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour, Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account. That soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss;—she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshort; a little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it, sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tanyard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tanpits full of water; and while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She

¹ Innocent partner of my peaceful home,
Whom ten long years' experience of my care
Has made at last familiar.

was then well washed in a bucket, to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws, and in one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express better than in the words of Terence a little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas*.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCXLVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Aug. 3, 1782.

. . . It is a sort of paradox, but it is true: we are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure, nor in reality more secure than when we seem to be most in danger. Both sides of this apparent contradiction were lately verified in my experience.—Passing from the greenhouse to the barn, I saw three kittens (for we have so many in our retinue) looking with fixed attention at something, which lay on the threshold of a door, coiled up. I took but little notice of them at first; but a loud hiss engaged me to attend more closely, when behold—a viper! the largest I remember to have seen, rearing itself, darting its forked tongue, and ejaculating the aforementioned hiss at the nose of a kitten almost in contact with his lips. I ran into the hall for a hoe with a long handle, with which I intended to assail him, and returning in a few seconds missed him: he was gone, and I feared had escaped me. Still however the kitten sat watching immoveably upon the same spot. I concluded, therefore, that, sliding between the door and the threshold, he had found his way out of the garden into the yard. I went round immediately, and there found him in close conversation with the old cat, whose curiosity being excited by so novel an appearance, inclined her to pat his head repeatedly with her fore foot; with her claws however sheathed, and not in anger, but in the way of philosophical inquiry and examination. To prevent her falling a victim to so laudable an exercise of her talents, I interposed in a moment with the hoe, and performed upon him an act of decapitation, which though not immediately mortal proved so in the end. Had he slid into the passages, where it is

dark, or had he, when in the yard, met with no interruption from the cat, and secreted himself in any of the outhouses, it is hardly possible but that some of the family must have been bitten; he might have been trodden upon without being perceived, and have slipped away before the sufferer could have well distinguished what foe had wounded him. Three years ago we discovered one in the same place, which the barber slew with a trowel.¹ . . .

Yours,
W. C.

CCXLVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Aug. 4, 1783.

. . . So much for ballads, and ballad writers. "A worthy subject," you will say, "for a man whose head might be filled with better things";—and *it is* filled with better things, but to so ill a purpose, that I thrust into it all manner of topics that may prove more amusing; as for instance, I have two goldfinches, which in the summer occupy the greenhouse. A few days since, being employed in cleaning out their cages, I placed that which I had in hand upon the table, while the other hung against the wall: the windows and the doors stood wide open. I went to fill the fountain at the pump, and on my return was not a little surprised to find a goldfinch sitting on the top of the cage I had been cleaning, and singing to and kissing the goldfinch within. I approached him, and he discovered no fear; still nearer, and he discovered none. I advanced my hand towards him, and he took no notice of it. I seized him, and supposed I had caught a new bird, but casting my eye upon the other cage perceived my mistake. Its inhabitant, during my absence, had contrived to find an opening, where the wire had been a little bent, and made no other use of the escape it afforded him, than to salute his friend, and to converse with him more intimately than he had done before. I returned him to his proper mansion, but in vain. In less than a minute he had thrust his little person through the aperture again, and again perched upon his neighbour's cage, kissing him, as at the first, and singing, as if transported with the fortunate adventure. I could not but respect such friendship, as for the sake of its gratification had twice declined an opportunity to be free, and, consenting to their union, resolved that for the future one cage should hold them both. I am glad of such

¹ See the poem entitled *The Colubriad* for another version of the above incident.

incidents; for at a pinch, and when I need entertainment, the versification of them serves to divert me. . . .

Yours ever,

W. C.

CCXLIX.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

July 27, 1785.

. . . You had been gone two days when a violent thunder-storm came over us. I was passing out of the parlour into the hall, with Mungo at my heels, when a flash seemed to fill the room with fire. In the same instant came the clap, so that the explosion was (I suppose) perpendicular to the roof. Mungo's courage upon the tremendous occasion constrained me to smile, in spite of the solemn impression that such an event never fails to affect me with;—the moment that he heard the thunder, (which was like the burst of a great gun,) with a wrinkled forehead, and with eyes directed to the ceiling, whence the sound seemed to proceed, he barked; but he barked exactly in concert with the thunder. It thundered once, and he barked once, and so precisely in the very instant when the thunder happened, that both sounds seemed to begin and to end together. Some dogs will clap their tails close, and sneak into a corner, at such a time, but Mungo it seems is of a more fearless family. A house at no great distance from ours was the mark to which the lightning was directed; it knocked down the chimney, split the building, and carried away the corner of the next house, in which lay a fellow drunk, and asleep upon his bed;—it roused and terrified him, and he promises to get drunk no more; but I have seen a woeful end of many such conversions. I remember but one such storm at Olney since I have known the place; and I am glad that it did not happen two days sooner for the sake of the ladies, who would probably, one of them at least, have been alarmed by it. You have left behind you Thomson's *Seasons*, and a bottle of hartshorn. I will not promise that you shall ever see the latter again; having a sore throat, I made free with part of it this morning, in the way of outward application, and we shall probably find a use for the remainder. The *Seasons* you shall have again. . . .

Yours ever,

W. C.

CCL.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Olney, Nov. 23, 1785.

. . . As to the king, I love and honour him upon a hundred accounts; and have, indeed, but one quarrel with him in the world; which is, that after having hunted a noble and beautiful animal, till he takes it perhaps at last in a lady's parlour, he in a few days turns it up and hunts it again. When stags are followed by such people as generally follow 'them, it is very well: their pursuers are men who do not pretend to much humanity, and when they discover none, they are perfectly consistent with themselves; but I have a far different opinion of the character of our king: he is a merciful man, and should therefore be more merciful to his beast. . . .

Our post comes in on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays; on the two former days about breakfast time, and on Sundays, at this season at least, in the afternoon. Adieu, my dear; I am never happier, I think, than when I am reading your letters, or answering them.

Ever yours,

WM. C.

CCLI.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Nov. 10, 1787.

The parliament, my dearest cousin, prorogued continually, is a meteor dancing before my eyes, promising me my wish only to disappoint me, and none but the king and his ministers can tell when you and I shall come together. I hope, however, that the period, though so often postponed, is not far distant, and that once more I shall behold you, and experience your power to make winter gay and sprightly.

I have a kitten, my dear, the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin. Her gambols are not to be described, and would be incredible, if they could. In point of size she is likely to be a kitten always, being extremely small of her age, but time I suppose, that spoils every thing, will make her also a cat. You will see her I hope before that melancholy period shall arrive, for no wisdom that she may gain by experience and reflection hereafter, will compensate the loss of her present hilarity. She is dressed in a tortoise-shell suit, and I know that you will delight in her.

Mrs. Throckmorton carries us to-morrow in her chaise to

Chicheley. The event, however, must be supposed to depend on elements, at least on the state of the atmosphere, which is turbulent beyond measure. Yesterday it thundered, last night it lightened, and at three this morning I saw the sky as red as a city in flames could have made it. I have a leech in a bottle that foretells all these prodigies and convulsions of Nature: no, not as you will naturally conjecture by articulate utterance of oracular notice, but by a variety of gesticulations, which here I have not room to give an account of. Suffice it to say, that no change of weather surprises him, and that in point of the earliest and most accurate intelligence, he is worth all the barometers in the world. None of them all indeed can make the least pretence to foretell thunder—a species of capacity of which he has given the most unequivocal evidence. I gave but sixpence for him, which is a groat more than the market price, though he is in fact, or rather would be, if leeches were not found in every ditch, an invaluable acquisition.

W. C.

CCLII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1787.

. . . I forgot to tell you that my dog¹ is spotted liver-colour and white, or rather white and chestnut. He is at present my pupil as well as dog, and just before I sat down to write I gave him a lesson in the science of fetch and carry. He performs with an animation past all conception, except your own, whose poor head will never forget Tinker. But I am now grown more reasonable, and never make such a dreadful din but when Beau and I are together. To teach him is necessary, in order that he may take the water, and *that* is necessary in order that he may be sweet in summer. Farewell, my dearest coz. I am, with Mrs. U.'s affections,

Ever thine, most truly,

WM. COWPER.

CCLIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 3, 1788.

One day last week, Mrs. Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk and returning homeward through the wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them, we

¹ Introduced in Letter No. LXXXV.

heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and mounting the broad stump of an elm which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all at that time in our orchard; presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, which you may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets within a few yards of us at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the wilderness, the hounds entered also; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman dismounting, begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they had killed him: a conclusion which I suppose he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having by the aid of a pitchfork lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard; and the hounds assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted; cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds;—one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, “tear him to pieces”—at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely. Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox,

and you now know as much of the matter, as I who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.¹

Yours,

W. C.

CCLIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 27, 1788.

For the sake of a longer visit, my dearest coz, I can be well content to wait. The country, this country at least, is pleasant at all times, and when winter is come, or near at hand, we shall have the better chance for being snug. I know your passion for retirement indeed, or for what we call *deedy* retirement, and the F——s intending to return to Bath with their mother, when her visit at the Hall is over, you will then find here exactly the retirement in question. I have made in the orchard the best winter-walk in all the parish, sheltered from the east, and from the north-east, and open to the sun, except at his rising, all the day. Then we will have Homer and *Don Quixote*: and then we will have saunter and chat, and one laugh more before we die. Our orchard is alive with creatures of all kinds; poultry of every denomination swarms in it, and pigs, the drollest in the world! . . .

I must tell you a feat of my dog Beau. Walking by the river side, I observed some water-lilies floating at a little distance from the bank. They are a large white flower, with an orange-coloured eye, very beautiful. I had a desire to gather one, and, having your long cane in my hand, by the help of it endeavoured to bring one of them within my reach. But the attempt proved vain, and I walked forward. Beau had all the while observed me very attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the river, while I was about forty yards distant from him; and, when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with a lily in his mouth, which he came and laid at my feet.² . . .

Yours, my dear, most truly,

W. C.

¹ For Cowper's opinion of hunting, see *The Task*, Book III (lines 326-7):

"Detested sport,
That owes its pleasures to another's pains "

² See the poem *The Dog and the Water-Lily*.

CCLV.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, Dec. 13, 1789.

... Received from my master, on account current with Lady Hesketh, the sum of—one kiss on my forehead. Witness my paw,

Beau × his mark.

CCLVI.

TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston, June 13, 1791.

... I am glad to find that your amusements have been so similar to mine; for in this instance too I seemed to have need of somebody to keep me in countenance, especially in my attention and attachment to animals¹ All the notice that we lords of the creation vouchsafe to bestow on the creatures, is generally to abuse them; it is well therefore that here and there a man should be found a little womanish, or perhaps a little childish in this matter, who will make some amends, by kissing, and coaxing, and laying them in one's bosom. You remember the little ewe lamb, mentioned by the prophet Nathan; the prophet perhaps invented the tale for the sake of its application to David's conscience; but it is more probable that God inspired him with it for that purpose. If He did, it amounts to a proof that He does not overlook, but on the contrary much notices such little partialities and kindness to His *dumb* creatures, as we, because we articulate, are pleased to call them. . . .

Most truly yours,

W. C.

¹ I would not enter on my list of friends
(Though graced with polished manners and fine sense
Yet wanting sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm

X. THE FRIEND OF SLAVES

(LETTERS CCLVII.-CCLXIII.)

Cowper's sympathy with the weak and the oppressed is nowhere better shown than in his attitude towards the slave question; he claims that he was "one of the earliest, if not the first, of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question." As early as 1781 he wrote:

"Canst thou, and honoured with a Christian name,
Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame?
Trade in the blood of innocence, and plead
Expedience as a warrant for the deed?"

Charity, 180-3.

He returns to the attack in *The Task* (Book II.), and when the subject of the slave trade was engaging the attention of the Government in 1788 and 1789, Cowper was among the foremost in the attempt to influence public opinion on behalf of the negroes. When the French Revolution had changed the attitude of many Englishmen towards the question, Cowper was still on the side of abolitionists like Wilberforce, to whom he penned a sonnet in 1792. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the fruits of their exertions in the Abolition Bill, which was passed in 1807.

CCLVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 16, 1788.

I have now three letters of yours, my dearest cousin, before me, all written in the space of a week, and must be indeed insensible of kindness, did I not feel yours on this occasion. I cannot describe to you, neither could you comprehend it if I should, the manner in which my mind is sometimes impressed with melancholy on particular subjects. Your late silence was such a subject. I heard, saw, and felt a thousand terrible things which had no real existence, and was haunted by them night and day, till they at last extorted from me the doleful epistle, which I have since wished had been burned before I sent it. But the cloud has passed, and as far as you are concerned, my heart is once more at rest.

Before you gave me the hint, I had once or twice, as I lay on my bed, watching the break of day, ruminated on the subject which, in your last but one, you recommended to me.

Slavery, or a release from slavery, such as the poor negroes have endured, or perhaps both these topics together, appeared to me a theme so important at the present juncture, and at the

same time so susceptible of poetical management, that I more than once perceived myself ready to start in that career, could I have allowed myself to desert Homer for so long a time as it would have cost me to do them justice.

While I was pondering these things, the public prints informed me that Miss More was on the point of publication, having actually finished what I had not yet begun. The sight of her advertisement convinced me that my best course would be that to which I felt myself most inclined,—to persevere, without turning aside to attend to any other call, however alluring, in the business I have in hand.

It occurred to me likewise, that I have already borne my testimony in favour of my black brethren: and that I was one of the earliest, if not the first, of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question.¹

On all these accounts I judged it best to be silent, and especially because I cannot doubt that some effectual measures will now be taken to alleviate the miseries of their condition, the whole nation being in possession of the case, and it being impossible also to allege an argument in behalf of man-merchandise, that can deserve a hearing. I shall be glad to see Hannah More's poem²; she is a favourite writer with me, and has more nerve and energy both in her thoughts and language than half the he rhymers in the kingdom. The *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* will likewise be most acceptable. I want to learn as much of the world as I can, but to acquire that learning at a distance; and a book with such a title promises fair to serve the purpose effectually.

Farewell

W. C.

CCLVIII.

TO THE REV JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Feb 19, 1788.

I have much to thank you for. In the first place for your Sermon; in which you have addressed your brethren with all the delicacy and fidelity that were due both to their character

¹ I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That snaws bought and sold have ever earned.

The Task, II. 29-32.

²Hannah More (1745-1833) is perhaps best known to-day for her moral novel, *Celebs in Search of a Wife*.

and your own. If they were not impressed by it, it must be because, like the rabbies of old, they are less impressible than others. Such I suppose they are, and will be, so long as doctorship and clerical honours of every degree shall have a tendency to make unenlightened simpletons imagine themselves the only interpreters of God. In the next place, for your thoughts on the Slave Trade; in which there is such evidence of conscientious candour and moderation as will make it, I doubt not, to all prudent persons the most satisfactory publication on the subject. It is a subject on which I can ruminate till I feel myself lost in mazes of speculation, never to be unravelled. Could I suppose that the cruel hardships under which millions of that unhappy race have lived and died, were only preparatory to a deliverance to be wrought for them hereafter, like that of Israel out of Egypt, my reasonings would cease, and I should at once acquiesce in a dispensation, severe indeed for a time, but leading to invaluable and everlasting mercies. But there is no room, Scripture affords no warrant for any such expectations. A question then presents itself which I cannot help asking, though conscious that it ought to be suppressed. Is it to be esteemed a sufficient vindication of divine justice, if these miserable creatures, tormented as they have been from generation to generation, shall at last receive some relief, some abatement of their woes, shall not be treated absolutely as brutes for the future? The thousands of them who have already passed into an eternal state, hopeless of anything better than they found in this life, what is to become of them? Is it essential to the perfection of a plan concerted by infinite wisdom, that such wretches should exist at all, who from the beginning of their being, through all its endless duration, can experience nothing for which they should say, It is good for us that we were created? These reasonings, and such as these engage me often, and more intensely than I wish them to do, when the case of the poor Negroes occurs to me. I know that the difficulty, if it cannot be solved, may be severed, and that the answer to which it lies open is this or somewhat like it,—God is sovereign: All are His, and He may do what He will with His own: What passes upon this grain of sand, which we call the earth, is trivial when considered with reference to those purposes that have the universe for their object. And lastly—All these things will be accounted for and explained hereafter. An answer like this would have satisfied me once, when I was myself happy; for I have frequently thought that the happy are easily reconciled to the woes of the miserable.

But in the school of affliction I have learned to cavil and to question; and finding myself in my own case reduced frequently to the necessity of accounting for my own lot by the means of an uncontrollable sovereignty which gives no account of its matters, am apt to discover, what appear to me, tremendous effects of the same sovereignty in the case of others. Then I feel—I will not tell you what—and yet I must—a wish that I had never been, a wonder that I am, and an ardent but hopeless desire not to be. Thus have I written to you my whole heart on a subject which I thought to have touched only, and to have left it. But the pen once in my hand, I am no longer master of my own intentions. . . .

Yours most sincerely, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

CCLIX.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 12, 1788.

Slavery and the Manners of the Great, I have read. The former I admired, as I do all that Miss More writes, as well for energy of expression as for the tendency of the design. I have never yet seen any production of her pen that has not recommended itself by both these qualifications. There is likewise much good sense in her manner of treating every subject, and no mere poetic cant (which is the thing that I abhor,) in her manner of treating any. And thus I say, not because you now know and visit her, but it has long been my avowed opinion of her works, which I have both spoken and written, as often as I have had occasion to mention them.

Mr. Wilberforce's¹ little book (if he was the author of it) has also charmed me. It must, I should imagine, engage the notice of those to whom it is addressed. In that case one may say to them, either answer it, or be set down by it! They will do neither. They will approve, commend, and forget it. Such has been the fate of all exhortations to reform, whether in verse or prose, and however closely pressed upon the conscience, in all ages. Here and there a happy individual, to whom God gives grace and wisdom to profit by the admonition, is the better for it. But the aggregate body (as Gilbert Cooper used to call the multitude) remain, though with a very good understanding of the matter, like horse and mule that have none. . . .

W. C.

¹ "Friend of the poor, the wronged, the fetter-galled."—*Sonnet to Wilberforce*.

CCLX.

TO GENERAL COWPER

MY DEAR GENERAL,

Weston, 1788.

A letter is not pleasant which excites curiosity, but does not gratify it. Such a letter was my last, the defects of which I therefore take the first opportunity to supply. When the condition of our negroes in the islands was first presented to me as a subject for songs, I felt myself not at all allured to the undertaking: it seemed to offer only images of horror, which could by no means be accommodated to the style of that sort of composition. But having a desire to comply, if possible, with the request made to me, after turning the matter in my mind as many ways as I could, I, at last, as I told you, produced three, and that which appears to myself the best of those three, I have sent you. Of the other two, one is serious,—in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous.¹ If I could think them worth your seeing, I would, as opportunity should occur, send them, also. If this amuses you, I shall be glad.²

W. C.

CCLXI.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 29, 1788,

. . . If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands, they are probably mine. It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble. I fear, however, that the attempt will fail. The tidings which have lately reached me from London concerning it, are not the most encouraging. While the matter slept, or was but slightly adverted to, the English only had their share of shame in common with other nations on account of it. But since it has been canvassed and searched to the bottom,—since the public attention has been riveted to the horrible scheme,—we can no longer plead either that we did not know it, or did not think of it. Wo be to us, if we refuse the poor captives the redress to which they have so clear a right, and prove ourselves in the sight of God and men indifferent to all considerations but those of gain.

Adieu.

W. C.

¹ Entitled *Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce, or The Slave-Trader in the Dumps.*

² *The Morning Dream* accompanied this letter.

CCLXII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 19, 1788.

I thank you for your last, and for the verses in particular, therein contained; in which there is not only rhyme but reason. And yet I fear that neither you nor I, with all our reasoning and rhiming, shall effect much good in this matter. So far as I can learn, and I have had intelligence from a quarter within the reach of such as is respectable, our governors are not animated altogether with such heroic ardour as the occasion might inspire. They consult frequently, indeed, in the cabinet about it; but the frequency of their consultations, in a case so plain as this would be, (did not what Shakespeare calls commodity, and what we call political expediency, cast a cloud over it,) rather bespeaks a desire to save appearances, than to interpose to purpose. Laws will, I suppose, be enacted for the more humane treatment of the negroes; but who shall see to the execution of them? The planters will not, and the negroes cannot. In fact we know, that laws of this tendency have not been wanting, enacted even amongst themselves; but there has been always a want of prosecutors, or righteous judges; deficiencies, which will not be very easily supplied. The newspapers have lately told us, that these merciful masters have, on this occasion, been occupied in passing ordonnances, by which the lives and limbs of their slaves are to be secured from wanton cruelty hereafter. But who does not immediately detect the artifice, or can give them a moment's credit for anything more than a design, by this show of lenity, to avert the storm which they think hangs over them? On the whole, I fear there is reason to wish, for the honour of England, that the nuisance had never been troubled; lest we eventually make ourselves justly chargeable with the whole offence by not removing it. The enormity cannot be palliated; we can no longer plead that we were not aware of it, or that our attention was otherwise engaged; and shall be inexcusable, therefore, ourselves, if we leave the least part of it unredressed. Such arguments as Pharaoh might have used to justify his destruction of the Israelites, substituting only sugar for bricks, may lie ready for our use also; but I think we can find no better. . . .

Affectionately and truly yours,

W. C.

CCLXIII.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR WALTER,

Weston, June 17, 1788

You think me, no doubt, a tardy correspondent, and such I

am, but not willingly. Many hindrances have intervened, and the most difficult to surmount have been those which the east and north-east winds have occasioned, breathing winter upon the roses of June, and inflaming my eyes, ten times more sensible of the inconvenience than they. The vegetables of England seem, like our animals, of a hardier and bolder nature than those of other countries. In France and Italy flowers blow, because it is warm, but here, in spite of the cold. The season however is somewhat mended at present, and my eyes with it. Finding myself this morning in perfect ease of body, I seize the welcome opportunity to do something at least towards the discharge of my arrears to you.

I am glad that you liked my song, and, if I liked the others myself so well as that I sent you, I would transcribe for you them also. But I sent *that*, because I accounted it the best. Slavery, and especially negro slavery, because the cruellest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But besides that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him for other matter, I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror, on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacency. But then they are such scenes as God, not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity.

Breakfast calls, and then Homer.

Ever yours,

W. C.

Erratum.—Instead of Mr. Wilberforce as author of *Manners of the Great*, read Hannah More.

My paper mourns, and my seal. It is for the death of a venerable uncle, Ashley Cowper, at the age of eighty-seven.

XI. HIS CRITICAL OPINIONS

Cowper's letters show that we have in him one of the ablest critics of the eighteenth century. Although his reading at Olney had been restricted because of his lack of books, yet he remembered much of what he had previously read and his criticisms are always acute and original. He had read but "one English poet these twenty years," and this we may surmise to be Milton, of whom he writes. "Few people have studied Milton more, or are more familiar with his poetry, than myself." He takes up cudgels on behalf of his favourite poet against Johnson's "unmerciful treatment" in the *Lives of the Poets*, and he defends Prior and Churchill against this "King Critic . . . a great bear, with all his learning and penetration." His remarks on Pope are particularly shrewd, and are in line with what he said of him in *Table Talk*.

"But he (his musical finesse was such,
So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
And every warbler has his tune by heart"—(lines 652-5).

Above all, it is interesting to read his criticism on those who belonged with himself to the new movement in poetry. "Thomson was admirable in description; but it always seemed to me that there was somewhat of affectation in his style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonised." Of Collins he mentions only the life by Johnson, but Gray he thinks "the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime." Beattie is "the most agreeable writer I ever met with," and he begs William Unwin to buy or borrow *The Minstrel* for him. He was one of the first Englishmen to recognise the genius of Burns, but his wish that Burns would "divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English" sounds very amusing to us to-day.

I. MILTON*

(LETTERS CCLXIV.-CCLXV.)

CCLXIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Jan. 17, 1782.

. . . You have already furnished John's memory with by far the greatest part of what a parent would wish to store it with. If all that is merely trivial, and all that has an immoral tendency, were expunged from our English poets, how would they shrink, and how would some of them completely vanish! I believe there are some of Dryden's Fables which he would find very entertaining; they are for the most part fine compositions, and not above his apprehension; but Dryden has written few things

that are not blotted here and there with an unchaste allusion, so that you must pick his way for him, lest he should tread in the dirt. You did not mention Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, which I remember being so charmed with when I was a boy that I was never weary of them. There are even passages in the paradisiacal part of the *Paradise Lost*, which he might study with advantage.¹ And to teach him, as you can, to deliver some of the fine orations made in the Pandæmonium, and those between Satan, Ithuriel, and Zephon, with emphasis, dignity, and propriety, might be of great use to him hereafter. The sooner the ear is formed, and the organs of speech are accustomed to the various inflections of the voice, which the rehearsal of those passages demands, the better. I should think too, that Thomson's *Seasons* might afford him some useful lessons. At least they would have a tendency to give his mind an observing and a philosophical turn. I do not forget that he is but a child. But I remember that he is a child favoured with talents superior to his years. We were much pleased with his remarks on your almsgiving, and doubt not but it will be verified with respect to the two guineas you sent us, which have made four Christian people happy. Ships I have none, nor have touched a pencil these three years; if ever I take it up again, which I rather suspect I shall not (the employment requiring stronger eyes than mine), it shall be at John's service.

Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

CCLXV.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Olney, Aug 31, 1786.

. . . The unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers, and the principles upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that they have with elisions in blank verse. But where is the remedy? In vain should you or I, and a few hundreds more perhaps who have studied his versification, tell them of the superior majesty of it, and that for that majesty it is greatly indebted to those elisions. In their ears, they are discord and dissonance; they lengthen the line beyond its due limits, and are therefore not to be endured.

¹ Then Milton had indeed a poet's charms.
New to my taste his "Paradise" surpassed
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue
To speak its excellence.

There is a whimsical inconsistency in the judgement of modern readers in this particular. Ask them all round, whom do you account the best writer of blank verse? and they will reply to a man, Milton, to be sure; Milton against the field! Yet if a writer of the present day should construct his numbers exactly upon Milton's plan, not one in fifty of these professed admirers of Milton would endure him. The case standing thus, what is to be done? An author must either be contented to give disgust to the generality, or he must humour them by sinning against his own judgement. This latter course, so far as elisions are concerned, I have adopted as essential to my success. In every other respect I give as much variety in my measure as I can, I believe I may say as in ten syllables it is possible to give, shifting perpetually the pause and cadence, and accounting myself happy that modern refinement has not yet enacted laws against this also. If it had, I protest to you I would have dropped my design of translating Homer entirely; and with what an indignant stateliness of reluctance I make them the concession that I have mentioned, Mrs. Unwin can witness, who hears all my complaints upon the subject. . . .

Adieu! *mon ami*, yours faithfully,

W. C.

2. POPE

(LETTERS CCLXVI.-CCLXX)

CCLXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 8, 1780.

It is possible I might have indulged myself in the pleasure of writing to you, without waiting for a letter from you, but for a reason which you will not easily guess. Your mother communicated to me the satisfaction you expressed in my correspondence, that you thought me entertaining and clever, and so forth: now you must know, I love praise dearly, especially from the judicious, and those who have so much delicacy themselves as not to offend mine in giving it. But then, I found this consequence attending, or likely to attend the eulogium you bestowed; if my friend thought me witty before, he shall think me ten times more witty hereafter; where I joked once, I will joke five times, and for one sensible remark I will send him a

dozen. Now this foolish vanity would have spoiled me quite, and would have made me as disgusting a letter-writer as Pope, who seems to have thought that unless a sentence was well turned, and every period pointed with some conceit, it was not worth the carriage. Accordingly he is to me, except in very few instances, the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with. I was willing, therefore, to wait till the impression your commendation had made upon the foolish part of me was worn off, that I might scribble away as usual, and write my uppermost thoughts, and those only. . . .

Yours,
W. C.

CCLXVII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 10, 1785.

. . . Your sentiments of Pope's Homer agree perfectly with those of every competent judge with whom I have at any time conversed about it. I never saw a copy so unlike the original. There is not, I believe, in all the world to be found an uninspired poem so simple as those of Homer; nor in all the world a poem more bedizened with ornaments than Pope's translation of them. Accordingly, the sublime of Homer in the hands of Pope becomes bloated and tumid, and his description tawdry. Neither had Pope the faintest conception of those exquisite discriminations of character for which Homer is so remarkable. All his persons, and equally upon all occasions, speak in an inflated and strutting phraseology, as Pope has managed them; although in the original the dignity of their utterance, even when they are most majestic, consists principally in the simplicity of their sentiments and of their language. Another censure I must needs pass upon our Anglo-Grecian, out of many that obtrude themselves upon me, but for which I have neither time to spare, nor room; which is, that with all his great abilities he was defective in his feelings to a degree that some passages in his own poems make it difficult to account for. No writer more pathetic than Homer, because none more natural; and because none less natural than Pope in his version of Homer, therefore than he none less pathetic. But I shall tire you with a theme with which I would not wish to cloy you beforehand. . . .

Yours, my dear friend, affectionately and faithfully,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

DEAREST COUSIN,

Thursday, Dec. 15, 1785.

. . . With respect to the enterprise itself, there are certain points of delicacy that will not suffer me to make a public justification of it. It would ill become me avowedly to point out the faults of Pope in a preface, and would be as impolitic as indecent. But to you, my dear, I can utter my mind freely. Let me premise, however, that you answered the gentleman's inquiry, whether in blank verse or not, to a marvel. It is even so: and let some critics say what they will, I aver it, and will for ever aver it, that to give a just representation of Homer in rhyme, is a natural impossibility. Now for Pope himself: I will allow his whole merit. He has written a great deal of very musical and sweet verse in his translation of Homer, but his verse is not universally such; on the contrary, it is often lame, feeble, and flat. He has, besides, occasionally a felicity of expression peculiar to himself; but it is a felicity purely modern, and has nothing to do with Homer. Except the Bible, there never was in the world a book so remarkable for that species of the sublime that owes its very existence to simplicity, as the works of Homer. He is always nervous, plain, natural. I refer you to your own knowledge of his copyist for a decision upon Pope's merits in these particulars. The garden in all the gaiety of June is less flowery than his Translation. Metaphors of which Homer never dreamt, which he did not seek, and which probably he would have disdained if he had found, follow each other in quick succession like the sliding pictures in a show box. Homer is, on occasions that call for such a style, the easiest, and most familiar of all writers: a circumstance that escaped Pope entirely, who takes most religious care that he shall everywhere strut in buckram. The speeches of his heroes are often animated to a degree that Pope no doubt accounted unmannerly and rude, for he has reduced numbers of them that are of that character to the perfect standard of French good-breeding. Shakespeare himself did not excel Homer in discrimination of character, neither is he more attentive to exact consistence and preservation of it throughout. In Pope, to whatever cause it was owing, whether he did not see it, or seeing it, accounted it an affair of no moment, this great beauty is almost absolutely annihilated. In short, my dear, there is hardly anything in the world so unlike another, as Pope's version of Homer to the original. Give me a great corking pin that I may stick your faith upon my sleeve. There—

it is done. Now assure yourself, upon the credit of a man who made Homer much his study in his youth, and who is perhaps better acquainted with Pope's translation of him than almost any man, having twenty-five years ago compared them with each other line by line throughout; upon the credit of a man, too, who would not for the world deceive you in the smallest matter, that Pope never entered into the spirit of Homer, that he never translated him, I had almost said, did not understand him: many passages it is literally* true that he did not. Why, when he first entered on his task, did he, (as he did, by his own confession,) for ever dream that he was wandering in unknown ways, that he was lost upon heaths and forests, and awoke in terror? I will tell you, my dear, his dreams were emblems of his waking experience; and I am mistaken, if I could not go near to prove that at his first setting out, he knew very little of Greek, and was never an adept in it, to the last. Therefore, my beloved cousin, once more take heart. I have a fair opportunity to acquire honour; and if when I have finished the Iliad, I do not upon cool consideration think that I have secured it, I will burn the copy. . . .

With true affection yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXIX.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Mond., Feb. 27, 1786.

. . . Now for Homer, and the matters to Homer appertaining. Sephus and I are of opinions perfectly different on the subject of such an advertisement as he recommends. The only proper part for me is not to know that such a man as Pope has ever existed. I am so nice upon this subject that in that note in the specimen, in which I have accounted for the anger of Achilles, (which, I believe, I may pay myself the compliment to say was never accounted for before,) I have not even so much as hinted at the perplexity in which Pope was entangled when he endeavoured to explain it, nor at the preposterous and blundering work that he has made with it. No, my dear, as I told you once before, my attempt has itself a loud voice, and speaks a most intelligible language. Had Pope's translation been good, or had I thought it such, or had I not known that it is admitted by all whom a knowledge of the original qualifies to judge of it, to be a very defective one, I had never translated myself one line of Homer. Dr. Johnson is the only modern writer who has spoken of it in terms of approbation, at least the only one that

I have met with. And his praise of it is such as convinces me, intimately acquainted as I am with Pope's performance, that he talked at random, that either he had never examined it by Homer's, or never since he was a boy. For I would undertake to produce numberless passages from it, if need were, not only ill translated, but meanly written. It is not therefore for me, convinced as I am of the truth of all I say, to go forth into the world holding up Pope's translation with one hand as a work to be extolled, and my own with the other as a work still wanted. It is plain to me that I behave with sufficient liberality on the occasion if, neither praising nor blaming my predecessor, I go right forward, and leave the world to decide between us. . . .

Yours most truly,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXX.

TO MR. JOHNSON

I did not write the line, that has been tampered with, hastily, or without due attention to the construction of it; and what appeared to me its only merit is, in its present state, entirely annihilated.

I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves. So that if a line do not run as smooth as quicksilver they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post, and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly, rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them!

I have said thus much, as I hinted in the beginning, because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines, which an ear, so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration, would undoubtedly condemn; and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on a plum, which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the

plum would be much more polished without it. But lest I tire you, I will only add, that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling; assuring you, that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it.

(See also Letter No. CLXXXVII.)

3. DR. JOHNSON

(LETTERS CCLXXI.—CCLXXX.)

CCLXXI. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 26, 1779.

. . . I am obliged to you for the *Poets*¹; and though I little thought that I was translating so much money out of your pocket into the bookseller's, when I turned Prior's poem into Latin, yet I must needs say that, if you think it worth while to purchase the English Classics at all, you cannot possess yourself of them upon better terms. I have looked into some of the volumes, but not having yet finished the Register have merely looked into them. A few things I have met with, which if they had been burned the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any; the English Muse would have lost no credit by the omission of such trash. Some of them again seem to me to have but a very disputable right to a place among the Classics; and I am quite at a loss, when I see them in such company, to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do. . . .

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXII. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Oct. 31, 1779.

I wrote my last letter merely to inform you that I had nothing to say; in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the propriety of your conduct though I am a loser by it. I will

¹ Just published.

endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something in return.

I have been well entertained with Johnson's biography, for which I thank you: with one exception, and that a swingeing one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. A pensioner is not likely to spare a republican; and the Doctor, in order, I suppose, to convince his royal patron of the sincerity of his monarchical principles, has belaboured that great poet's character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life, and a rancorous hatred of everything royal in his public, are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvass. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor's picture of him; and it is well for Milton, that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged; it is evident enough that if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wing, and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon *Lycidas*, and has taken occasion, from that charming poem, to expose to ridicule, (what is indeed ridiculous enough,) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if *Lycidas* was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for nothing. I am convinced by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever anything so delightful as the music of the *Paradise Lost*? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute. Variety without end and never equalled, unless perhaps by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh! I could thresh his old jacket, till I made his pension jingle in his pocket.

I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room; our love attends you.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

CCLXXIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.

. . . I have no objection in the world to your conveying a copy ¹ to Dr. Johnson; though I well know that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its ways into all companies, and spoil the sale. He writes, indeed, like a man that thinks a great deal, and that sometimes thinks religiously: but report informs me that he has been severe enough in his animadversions upon Dr. Watts, who was nevertheless, if I am in any degree a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless, indeed, for the most part, and inattentive too often to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions, and masterly in his execution. Pope, I have heard, had placed him once in the *Dunciad*; but on being advised to read before he judged him, was convinced that he deserved other treatment, and thrust somebody's blockhead into the gap, whose name, consisting of a monosyllable, happened to fit it. Whatever faults, however, I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called *Creation*, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country), and my success will be secured. . . .

WILLIAM.

CCLXXIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Jan. 5, 1782.

Did I allow myself to plead the common excuse of idle correspondents, and esteem it a sufficient reason for not writing, that I have nothing to write about, I certainly should not write now. But I have so often found, on similar occasions, when a great penury of matter has seemed to threaten me with an utter impossibility of hatching a letter, that nothing is necessary but

¹ Of his satires.

to put pen to paper, and go on, in order to conquer all difficulties,—that, availing myself of past experience, I now begin with a most assured persuasion, that sooner or later, one idea naturally suggesting another, I shall come to a most prosperous conclusion.

In the last *Review*, I mean in the last but one, I saw Johnson's critique upon Prior and Pope. I am bound to acquiesce in his opinion of the latter, because it has always been my own. I could never agree with those who preferred him to Dryden; nor with others, (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too,) who could allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses, and in every line he ever wrote, we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, but so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such. (at least sometimes.) as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal. So far, therefore, I have no quarrel with Johnson. But I cannot subscribe to what he says of Prior. In the first place, though my memory may fail me, I do not recollect that he takes any notice of his *Solomon*; in my mind the best poem, whether we consider the subject of it, or the execution, that he ever wrote. In the next place, he condemns him for introducing Venus and Cupid into his love-verses, and concludes it impossible his passion could be sincere, because when he would express it he has recourse to fables. But when Prior wrote, those deities were not so obsolete as now. His contemporary writers, and some that succeeded him, did not think them beneath their notice. Tibullus, in reality, disbelieved their existence as much as we do; yet Tibullus is allowed to be the prince of all poetical inamoratos, though he mentions them in almost every page. There is a fashion in these things, which the Doctor seems to have forgotten. But what shall we say of his old fusty-rusty remarks upon *Henry and Emma*? I agree with him, that morally considered both the knight and his lady are bad characters, and that each exhibits an example

which ought not to be followed. The man dissembles in a way that would have justified the woman had she renounced him; and the woman resolves to follow him at the expense of delicacy, propriety, and even modesty itself. But when the critic calls it a dull dialogue, who but a critic will believe him? There are few readers of poetry of either sex, in this country, who cannot remember how that enchanting piece has bewitched them, who do not know, that instead of finding it tedious, they have been so delighted with the romantic turn of it, as to have overlooked all its defects, and to have given it a consecrated place in their memories without ever feeling it a burthen. I wonder almost, that, as the Bacchanals served Orpheus, the boys and girls do not tear this husky, dry commentator limb from limb, in resentment of such an injury done to their darling poet. I admire Johnson as a man of great erudition and sense; but when he sets himself up for a judge of writers upon the subject of love, a passion which I suppose he never felt in his life, he might as well think himself qualified to pronounce upon a treatise on horsemanship, or the art of fortification.

The next packet I receive will bring me, I imagine, the last proof-sheet of my volume, which will consist of about three hundred and fifty pages honestly printed. My public *entrée* therefore is not far distant.

Had we known that the last cheeses were naught, we would not have sent you these. Your mother has however inquired for and found a better dairy, which she means shall furnish you with cheese another year.

Yours,

W. C.

CCCLXXV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Jan 17, 1782

I am glad we agree in our opinion of King Critic, and the writers on whom he has bestowed his animadversions. It is a matter of indifference to me whether I think with the world at large or not, but I wish my friends to be of my mind. The same work will wear a different appearance in the eyes of the same man, according to the different views with which he reads it; if merely for his amusement, his candour being in less danger of a twist from interest or prejudice, he is pleased with what is really pleasing, and is not over curious to discover a blemish, because the exercise of a minute exactness is not consistent with his purpose. But if he once becomes a critic by trade, the

case is altered. He must then at any rate establish, if he can, an opinion in every mind, of his uncommon discernment, and his exquisite taste. This great end he can never accomplish by thinking in the track that has been beaten under the hoof of public judgement. He must endeavour to convince the world, that their favourite authors have more faults than they are aware of, and such as they have never suspected. Having marked out a writer universally esteemed, whom he finds it for that very reason convenient to depreciate and traduce, he will overlook some of his beauties, he will faintly praise others, and in such a manner as to make thousands, more modest, though quite as judicious as himself, question whether they are beauties at all. Can there be a stronger illustration of all that I have said, than the severity of Johnson's remarks upon Prior, I might have said the injustice? His reputation as an author who, with much labour indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease, stood unshaken till Johnson thrust his head against it. And how does he attack him in this principal fort? I cannot recollect his very words, but I am much mistaken indeed if my memory fails me with respect to the purport of them. "His words," he says, "appear to be forced into their proper places; there indeed we find them, but find likewise that their arrangement has been the effect of constraint, and that without violence they would certainly have stood in a different order." By your leave, most learned Doctor, this is the most disingenuous remark I ever met with, and would have come with a better grace from Curl or Dennis. Every man conversant with verse-writing knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose, without being prosaic,—to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior; many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original. And now to tell us, after we and our fathers have admired him for it so long, that he is an easy writer indeed, but that his ease has an air of stiffness in it, in short, that his ease is not ease, but only something like it, what is it but a self-contradiction, an observation that grants what it is just going to deny, and denies what it

has just granted, in the same sentence, and in the same breath? But I have filled the greatest part of my sheet with a very uninteresting subject. I will only say, that as a nation we are not much indebted, in point of poetical credit, to this too sagacious and unmerciful judge; and that for myself in particular, I have reason to rejoice that he entered upon and exhausted the labours of his office before my poor volume could possibly become an object of them. . . .

• Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCLXXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

March 21, 1784.

I thank you for the entertainment you have afforded me. I often wish for a library, often regret my folly in selling a good collection; but I have one in Essex. It is rather remote, indeed, too distant for occasional reference; but it serves the purpose of amusement, and a waggon being a very suitable vehicle for an author, I find myself commodiously supplied. Last night I made an end of reading Johnson's *Prefaces*; but the number of poets whom he has vouchsafed to chronicle being fifty-six, there must be many with whose history I am not yet acquainted. These, or some of these, if it suits you to give them a part of your chaise, when you come, will be heartily welcome. I am very much the biographer's humble admirer. His uncommon share of good sense, and his forcible expression, secure to him that tribute from all his readers. He has a penetrating insight into character, and a happy talent of correcting the popular opinion, upon all occasions where it is erroneous; and this he does with the boldness of a man who will think for himself, but, at the same time, with a justness of sentiment that convinces us he does not differ from others through affectation, but because he has a sounder judgement. This remark, however, has his narrative for its object, rather than his critical performance. In the latter, I do not think him always just, when he departs from the general opinion. He finds no beauties in Milton's *Lycidas*. He pours contempt upon Prior, to such a degree, that were he really as undeserving of notice as he represents him, he ought no longer to be numbered among the poets. These, indeed, are the two capital instances in which he has offended me. There are others less important, which I have not room to enumerate, and in which I am less confident that he is wrong. What suggested

to him the thought that the *Alma* was written in imitation of *Hudibras*, I cannot conceive. In former years, they were both favourites of mine, and I often read them; but never saw in them the least resemblance to each other; nor do I now, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure. After all, it is a melancholy observation, which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series of poetical lives, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed! So much can Nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral. What vanity, what petulance in Pope! How painfully sensible of censure, and yet how restless in provocation! To what mean artifices could Addison stoop, in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend! Savage, how sordidly vicious, and the more condemned for the pains that are taken to palliate his vices. Offensive as they appear through a veil, how would they disgust without one. What a sycophant to the public taste was Dryden; sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings, though chaste in his conversation. I know not but one might search these eight volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he.

I shall begin Beattie this evening, and propose to myself much satisfaction in reading him. In him, at least, I shall find a man whose faculties have now and then a glimpse from Heaven upon them;—a man, not indeed in possession of much evangelical light, but faithful to what he has, and never neglecting an opportunity to use it. How much more respectable such a character, than that of thousands who would call him blind, and yet have not the grace to practise half his virtues! He, too, is a poet, and wrote the *Minstrel*. The specimens which I have seen of it pleased me much. If you have the whole, I should be glad to read it. I may, perhaps, since you allow me the liberty, indulge myself here and there, with a marginal annotation, but shall not use that allowance wantonly, so as to deface the volumes.

Your mother wishes you to buy for her ten yards and a half of yard-wide Irish, from two shillings to two shillings and sixpence per yard; and my head will be equally obliged to you for a hat, of which I enclose a string that gives you the circumference. The depth of the crown must be four inches and one-eighth. Let it not be a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart

well-cocked fashionable affair. A fashionable hat likewise for your mother; a black one if they are worn, otherwise chip.

Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

CCLXXVII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 5, 1784.

When you told me that the critique upon my volume was written, though not by Dr. Johnson himself, yet by a friend of his, to whom he recommended the book and the business, I inferred from that expression that I was indebted to him for an active interposition in my favour, and consequently that he had a right to thanks. But now I concur entirely in sentiment with you, and heartily second your vote for the suppression of thanks which do not seem to be much called for. Yet even now were it possible that I could fall into his company, I should not think a slight acknowledgement misapplied. I was no other way anxious about his opinion, nor could be so, after you and some others had given a favourable one, than it was natural I should be, knowing, as I did, that his opinion had been consulted.

I am affectionately yours,

W. C.

CCLXXVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

August 27, 1785.

. . . If it be fair to judge of a book by an extract, I do not wonder that you were so little edified by Johnson's *Journal*. It is even more ridiculous than was poor ———'s of flatulent memory. The portion of it given to us in this day's paper contains not one sentiment worth one farthing; except the last, in which he resolves to bind himself with no more unbidden obligations. Poor man! one would think, that to pray for his dead wife, and to pinch himself with church fasts, had been almost the whole of his religion. I am sorry that he, who was so manly an advocate for the cause of virtue in all other places, was so childishly employed, and so superstitiously too, in his closet. Had he studied his Bible more, to which by his own confession he was in great part a stranger, he had known better what use to make of his retired hours, and had trifled less. His lucubrations of this sort have rather the appearance of religious dotage, than of any vigorous exertions towards God. It will be well if the publication prove not hurtful in its effects, by exposing the

best cause, already too much despised, to ridicule still more profane. On the other side of the same paper I find a long string of aphorisms, and maxims, and rules, for the conduct of life, which, though they appear not with his name, are so much in his manner with the above-mentioned, that I suspect them for his. I have not read them all, but several of them I read that were trivial enough: for the sake of one, however, I forgive him the rest; he advises never to banish hope entirely, because it is the cordial of life, although it be the greatest flatterer in the world. Such a measure of hope as may not endanger my peace by disappointment I would wish to cherish upon every subject, in which I am interested. But there lies the difficulty,—mine at least; whose sanguine temper does not incline me to, nor even permit me, moderation in anything. A cure, however, and the only one, for all the irregularities both of hope and fear, is found in submission to the will of God. Happy they that have it! . . .

Adieu, my dear William! I have scribbled with all my might, which, breakfast-time excepted, has been my employment ever since I rose, and it is now past one.

Yours,

W. C.

CCLXXIX.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The Lodge, June 5, 1789.

. . . I return you many thanks for Boswell's *Tour*. I read it to Mrs. Unwin after supper, and we find it amusing. There is much trash in it, as there must always be in every narrative that relates indiscriminately all that passed. But now and then the Doctor speaks like an oracle, and that makes amends for all. Sir John was a coxcomb, and Boswell is not less a coxcomb, though of another kind. I fancy Johnson made coxcombs of all his friends, and they in return made him a coxcomb; for, with reverence be it spoken, such he certainly was, and flattered as he was, he was sure to be so.

Thanks for your invitation to London,—but unless London can come to me, I fear we shall never meet. I was sure that you would love my friend, when you should once be well acquainted with him; and equally sure that he would take kindly to you.

Now for Homer.

W. C.

CCLXXX.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT¹

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, March 18, 1791.

I give you joy that you are about to receive some more of my elegant prose, and I feel myself in danger of attempting to make it even more elegant than usual, and thereby of spoiling it, under the influence of your commendations. But my old helter-skelter manner has already succeeded so well, that I will not, even for the sake of entitling myself to a still greater portion of your praise, abandon it.

I did not call in question Johnson's true spirit of poetry, because he was not qualified to relish blank verse (though, to tell you the truth, I think that but an ugly symptom); but if I did not express it I meant however to infer it from the perverse judgement that he has formed of our poets in general; depreciating some of the best, and making honourable mention of others, in my opinion not undeservedly neglected. I will lay sixpence that, had he lived in the days of Milton, and by any accident had met with his *Paradise Lost*, he would neither have directed the attention of others to it, nor have much admired it himself. Good sense, in short, and strength of intellect, seem to me, rather than a fine taste, to have been his distinguished characteristics. But should you still think otherwise, you have my free permission; for so long as you have yourself a taste for the beauties of Cowper, I care not a fig whether Johnson had a taste or not. . . .

Accept our joint remembrances, and believe me, affectionately yours,

W. C.

4. THOMSON

(LETTER CCLXXXI.)

CCLXXXI.

TO MRS. KING

June 19, 1788.

Do you consider what you do, when you ask one poet his opinion of another? Yet I think I can give you an honest answer to your question, and without the least wish to nibble. Thomson was admirable in description; but it always seemed to me that there was somewhat of affectation in his style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonised. I could wish too

with Dr. Johnson, that he had confined himself to this country; for when he describes what he never saw, one is forced to read him with some allowance for possible misrepresentation. He was, however, a true poet, and his lasting fame has proved it. Believe me, my dear madam, with my best respects to Mr. King, most truly yours,

W. C.

5. COLLINS

(LETTER CCLXXXII.)

CCLXXXII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 19, 1784.

. . . I have lately finished eight volumes of Johnson's *Prefaces*, or *Lives of the Poets*. In all that number I observe but one man,—a poet of no great fame,—of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there, whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found at his lodgings in Islington by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, "I have but one book, but it is the best." Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn:—that poets are a very worthless, wicked set of people. . . .

Yours,

W. C.

6. GRAY

(LETTERS CCLXXXIII.—CCLXXXIV.)

CCLXXXIII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April—I fancy the 20th, 1777.

Thanks for a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone¹: a gentleman who relates his travels so agreeably, that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion. I have been reading Gray's Works, and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him: I was

¹ He wrote a popular book on his travels in Sicily and Malta

prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His humour, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive, and yet, I think equally poignant with the Dean's.

I am yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXXIV.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 25, 1777.

We differ not much in our opinion of Mr. Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think, are worth little, *as such*, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgement. As to Mr. West's *Letters*,¹ I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but having nothing in them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not. I should like the philosophical part of it, but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present.

Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

7. CHURCHILL

(LETTER CCLXXXV.)

CCLXXXV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

How apt we are to deceive ourselves where self is in question! you say I am in your debt, and I accounted you in mine; a mistake to which you must attribute my arrears, if indeed I owe you any, for I am not backward to write where the uppermost thought is welcome.

I am obliged to you for all the books you have occasionally

¹ West was Gray's friend.

furnished me with: I did not indeed read many of Johnson's Classics; those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again: and as to the minor Classics, I did not think them worth reading at all;—I tasted most of them, and did not like them. It is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved the name of poet: I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. The pitiful scribbler of his life seems to have undertaken that task, for which he was entirely unqualified, merely because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him. He has inserted in it but one anecdote of consequence, for which he refers you to a novel, and introduces the story with doubts about the truth of it. But his barrenness as a biographer I could forgive, if the simpleton had not thought himself a judge of his writings, and under the erroneous influence of that thought, informed his reader that *Gotham*, *Independence*, and the *Times*, were catchpennies. *Gotham*, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which I make no doubt the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance, (and Dryden in his *Absalom and Achitophel* stands in need of the same indulgence,) for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance. *Independence* is a most animated piece, full of strength and spirit, and marked with that bold masculine character which, I think, is the great peculiarity of this writer. And the *Times*, (except that the subject is disgusting to the last degree,) stands equally high in my opinion. He is indeed a careless writer for the most part; but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on, and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise that he never is guilty of those faults as a writer, which he lays to the charge of others. A proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics, but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much, and so fast, would through inadvertency and hurry unavoidably have

departed from rules which he might have found in books, but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err. A race-horse is graceful in his swiftest pace, and never makes an awkward motion though he is pushed to his utmost speed. A cart-horse might perhaps be taught to play tricks in the riding-school, and might prance and curvet like his betters, but at some unlucky time would be sure to betray the baseness of his original. It is an affair of very little consequence perhaps to the well-being of mankind, but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph:

*Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent.*

Yours,

W. C.

8. BEATTIE .

(LETTER CCLXXXVI.)

CCLXXXVI. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

April 5, 1784.

The hat which I desired you to procure for me, I now write to desire that you will not procure. Do not hastily infer that I mean to go about bareheaded: the whole of the matter is, that a readier method of supply has presented itself since I wrote.

I thanked you in my last for Johnson; I now thank you, with more emphasis, for Beattie, the most agreeable and amiable writer I ever met with; the only author I have seen whose critical and philosophical researches are diversified and embellished by a poetical imagination, that makes even the driest subject, and the leanest, a feast for an epicure in books. He is so much at his ease too, that his own character appears in every page, and which is very rare, we see not only the writer but the man: and that man so gentle, so well-tempered, so happy in his religion, and so humane in his philosophy, that it is necessary to love him, if one has the least sense of what is lovely. If you have not his poem called the *Minstrel*,¹ and cannot borrow it, I must beg you to buy it for me; for though I cannot afford to

¹ Published in 1771 (Book I) and 1774 (Book II.).

deal largely in so expensive a commodity as books, I must afford to purchase at least the poetical works of Beattie. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

9. BURNS

(LETTERS CCLXXXVII.—CCLXXXVIII.)

CCLXXXVII.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Weston, July 24, 1787.

This is the first time I have written these six months,¹ and nothing but the constraint of obligation could induce me to write now. I cannot be so wanting to myself as not to endeavour at least to thank you both for the visits with which you have favoured me, and the poems that you sent me; in my present state of mind I taste nothing, nevertheless I read, partly from habit, and partly because it is the only thing that I am capable of.

I have therefore read Burns's poems, and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is I believe the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare, (I should rather say since Prior,) who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured. It will be pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel. He who can command admiration, dishonours himself if he aims no higher than to raise a laugh.

I am, dear sir, with my best wishes for your prosperity, and with Mrs. Unwin's respects,

Your obliged and affectionate humble servant,

W. C.

CCLXXXVIII.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Weston, Aug. 27, 1787.

. . . Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country, through our ignorance of his language. I despair of

¹ Owing to another attack of insanity.

meeting with any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern.¹ I lent him to a very sensible neighbour of mine: but his uncouth dialect spoiled all; and before he had half read him through, he was quite *ram-feeled*.

W. C.

¹ In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars.—*Comus*, 197.

XII. HIS READING

(LETTERS CCLXXXIX.—CCXCVI.)

We have already noticed that Cowper's reading was scanty, owing to his being "heavenously unprovided" with books, as he wrote to Hayley; and his not unfrequent misquotations seem to bear this out. The library that he had collected at the Temple had been dispersed after his removal to St. Albans, and he had to rely upon the kindness of friends and the circulating library to supply his wants. He had evidently been a reader of poetry in his youth, for he says: "I did not read many of Johnson's Classics; those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again." He requests William Unwin to purchase him various second-hand copies of the classics that he "may go to school again and refresh his spirit by a little intercourse" with the Greek and Roman bards; for lighter reading, he enjoyed works of travel and the novels of Richardson, Fielding, and others of his contemporaries. Historical works also interested him; he mentions his reading of Clarendon and Hume, whilst for some time, his "only history in the world" was Sir Roger de Coverley's favourite, Baker's *Chronicle*

CCLXXXIX.

TO THE REV. W. UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 8, 1780

. . . From a general recollection of Lord Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, I thought (and I remember I told you so) that there was a striking resemblance between that period and the present. But I am now reading, and have read three volumes of Hume's *History*, one of which is engrossed entirely by that subject. There I see reason to alter my opinion, and the seeming resemblance has disappeared upon a more particular information. Charles succeeded to a long train of arbitrary princes, whose subjects had tamely acquiesced in the despotism of their masters, till their privileges were all forgot. He did but tread in their steps, and exemplify the principles in which he had been brought up, when he oppressed his people. But just at that time, unhappily for the monarch, the subject began to see, and to see that he had a right to property and freedom. This marks a sufficient difference between the disputes of that day and the present. But there was another main cause of that rebellion, which at this time does not operate at all. The king was devoted to the hierarchy; his subjects were puritans and

would not bear it. Every circumstance of ecclesiastical order and discipline was an abomination to them, and in his esteem an indispensable duty. And though at last he was obliged to give up many things, he would not abolish episcopacy; and till that were done his concessions could have no conciliating effect. These two concurring causes were indeed sufficient to set three kingdoms in a flame. But they subsist not now, nor any other, I hope, notwithstanding the bustle made by the patriots, equal to the production of such terrible events.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCXC.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 3, 1780

I am glad you are so provident, and that, while you are yet young, you have furnished yourself with the means of comfort in old age. Your crutch and your pipe may be of use to you, (and may they be so,) should your years be extended to an antediluvian date; and for your present accommodation, you seem to want nothing but a clerk called Snuffle, and a sexton of the name of Skeleton, to make your ministerial equipage complete.

I think I have read as much of the first volume of the *Biographia*¹ as I shall ever read. I find it very amusing; more so, perhaps, than it would have been had they sifted their characters with more exactness, and admitted none but those who had in some way or other entitled themselves to immortality, by deserving well of the public. Such a compilation would perhaps have been more judicious, though I confess it would have afforded less variety. The priests and the monks of earlier, and the doctors of later days, who have signalised themselves by nothing but a controversial pamphlet, long since thrown by, and never to be perused again, might have been forgotten, without injury or loss to the national character for learning or genius. This observation suggested to me the following lines, which may serve to illustrate my meaning, and at the same time to give my criticism a sprightlier air.

Oh fond attempt, to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
In vain, recorded in historic page,
They court the notice of a future age;

¹ The *Biographia Britannica*, of which only five volumes (down to F) were completed. It well merits Cowper's criticism.

Those twinkling, tiny lustres of the land
 Drop one by one, from Fame's neglecting hand;
 Lethean gulfs receive them as they fall,
 And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.
 So when a child (as playful children use)
 Has burnt to cinder a stale last year's news,
 The flame extinct, he views the roving fire,
 There goes my lady, and there goes the squire,
 There goes the parson—O illustrious spark!
 And there—scarce less illustrious—goes the clerk!

Virgil admits none but worthies into the Elysian Fields; I cannot recollect the lines in which he describes them all, but these in particular I well remember:

*Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo,
 Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes.*

A chaste and scrupulous conduct like his would well become the writer of national biography. But enough of this.

Our respects attend Miss Shuttleworth, with many thanks for her intended present. Some purses derive all their value from their contents, but these will have an intrinsic value of their own: and though mine should be often empty, which is not an improbable supposition, I shall still esteem it highly on its own account.

If you could meet with a second-hand Virgil, ditto Homer, both Iliad and Odyssey, together with a Clavis, for I have no Lexicon, and all tolerably cheap, I shall be obliged to you if you will make the purchase.

Yours,

W. C.

CCXCI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

July 3, 1784.

I was sorry that I could only take a flying leave of you. When the coach stopped at the door, I thought you had been in your chamber; my dishabille would not otherwise have prevented my running down for the sake of a more suitable parting.

We rejoice that you had a safe journey, and though we should have rejoiced still more had you had no occasion for a physician, we are glad that, having had need of one, you had the good fortune to find him. Let us hear soon that his advice has proved effectual, and that you are delivered from all ill symptoms.

Thanks for the care you have taken to furnish me with a dictionary. It is rather strange that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one,

and stranger still that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have a thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bard; and perhaps by a reperusal of some others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them, when, the judgement and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked. . . .

Believe me ever yours,

W. C.

CCXCII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, Sept. 4, 1787.

Come when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry too that my uncle's infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some snatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it*, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future. . . .

I have read Savary's *Travels into Egypt*; *Memoires du Baron de Tott*; Fenn's *Original Letters*; the *Letters of Frederic of Bohemia*; and am now reading *Memoires d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise*. I have also read Barclay's *Argenis*, a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written. All these, together with Madan's *Letters to Priestley*, and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader.

W. C.

CCXCIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, Feb 2, 1788.

Thanks beforehand for the books which you give me to expect. They will all be welcome. Of the two editions of Shakespeare I prefer that which is printed in the largest type,

independent of all other considerations. *Don Quixote* by any hand must needs be welcome, and by Smollett's especially, because I have never seen it. He had a drollery of his own, which, for aught I know, may suit an English taste as well as that of Cervantes, perhaps better, because to us somewhat more intelligible. . . .

Affectionately yours,
WM. COWPER.

CCXCIV. TO THE REV. W. BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Sept. 21, 1791

. . . I have not a history in the world except Baker's *Chronicle* and that I borrowed three years ago from Mr. Throckmorton. Now the case is this; I am translating Milton's third Elegy—his *Elegy on the Death of the Bishop of Winchester*. He begins it with saying, that while he was sitting alone, dejected, and musing on many melancholy themes,—first, the idea of the plague presented itself to his mind, and of the havoc made by it among the great. Then he proceeds thus:

*Tum memini clarique ducis, fratrisque verendi
Intempestivis ossa cremata rogis:
Et memini Heroum, quos vidit ad æthera raptos,
Flevit et amissos Belgia tota duces.*

I cannot learn from my only oracle, Baker, who this famous leader and his reverend brother were. Neither does he at all ascertain for me the event alluded to in the second of these couplets. I am not yet possessed of Warton, who probably explains it, nor can be for a month to come. Consult him for me if you have him, or if you have him not consult some other;—or you may find the intelligence perhaps in your own budget; no matter how you come by it, only send it to me if you can, and as soon as you can, for I hate to leave unsolved difficulties behind me. In the first year of Charles the First, Milton was seventeen years of age, and then wrote this Elegy. The period therefore to which I would refer you, is the two or three last years of James the First.

Ever yours,
W. C.

CCXCV. TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec 8, 1793.

In my last I forgot to thank you for the box of books, containing also the pamphlets. We have read, that is to say my

cousin has who reads to us in an evening, the *History of Jonathan Wild*; and found it highly entertaining. The satire on great men is witty, and I believe perfectly just; we have no censure to pass on it, unless that we think the character of Mrs. Heartfree not well sustained,—not quite delicate in the latter part of it,—and that the constant effect of her charms upon every man who sees her has a sameness in it that is tiresome, and betrays either much carelessness, or idleness, or lack of invention. It is possible indeed that the author might intend by this circumstance a satirical glance at novelists, whose heroines are generally all bewitching; but it is a fault that he had better have noticed in another manner, and not have exemplified in his own.

The first volume of *Man as he is* has lain unread in my study window this twelvemonth, and would have been returned unread to its owner, had not my cousin come in good time to save it from that disgrace. We are now reading it, and find it excellent,—abounding with wit and just sentiment, and knowledge both of books and men.

Adieu!

•
W. C.

CCXCVI.

TO MRS. HILL

MY DEAR MADAM.

March 17, 1788

A thousand thanks to you for your obliging and most acceptable present, which I received safe this evening. Had you known my occasions, you could not possibly have timed it more exactly. The Throckmorton family, who live in our neighbourhood, and who sometimes take a dinner with us, were, by engagement made with them two or three days ago, appointed to dine with us just at the time when your turkey will be in perfection. A turkey from Wargrave, the residence of my friend, and a turkey, as I conclude, of your breeding, stands a fair chance, in my account, to excel all other turkeys; and the ham, its companion, will be no less welcome.

I shall be happy to hear that my friend Joseph has recovered entirely from his late indisposition, which I was informed was gout; a distemper which, however painful in itself, brings at least some comfort with it, both for the patient and those who love him, the hope of length of days, and an exemption from numerous other evils. I wish him just so much of it as may serve for a confirmation of this hope, and not one twinge more.

Your husband, my dear Madam, told me, some time since,

that a certain library of mine, concerning which I have heard no other tidings these five and twenty years, is still in being. Hue and cry have been made after it in Old Palace Yard, but hitherto in vain. If he can inform a bookless student in what region or in what nook his long-lost volumes may be found, he will render me an important service.

I am likely to be furnished soon with shelves, which my cousin of New Norfolk Street is about to send me; but furniture for these shelves I shall not presently procure, unless by recovering my stray authors. I am not young enough to think of making a new collection, and shall probably possess myself of few books hereafter but such as I may put forth myself, which cost me nothing but what I can better spare than money—time and consideration.

I beg, my dear Madam, that you will give my love to my friend, and believe me, with the warmest sense of his and your kindness,

Your most obliged and affectionate

WM. COWPER.

XIII. HIS HUMOUR

(LETTERS CCXCVII.—CCCI.)

We have already had abundant evidence of Cowper's extraordinary vivacity, playfulness and humour in the preceding letters. Some of the most famous examples remain to be quoted: the rhyming letter and the story of the candidate's visit are two of the most celebrated, but the story of the merciful beadle deserves to be equally well known.

CCXCVII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

July 12, 1781.

I am going to send, what when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there's nobody knows, whether what I have got, be verse or not: by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme; but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before? The thought did occur, to me and to her, as Madam and I, did walk and not fly, over hills and dales, with spreading sails, before it was dark, to Weston Park.

The news at *Oney* is little or none, but such as it is, I send it, viz. Poor Mr. Peace cannot yet cease, addling his head with what you said, and has left parish-church quite in the lurch, having almost sworn to go there no more.

Page¹ and his wife, that made such a strife, we met them twain in Dog Lane; we gave them the wall, and that was all. For Mr. Scott,² we have seen him not, except as he pass'd, in a wonderful haste, to see a friend in Silver End. Mrs. Jones proposes, ere July closes, that she and her sister,³ and her Jones Mister, and we that are here, our course shall steer, to dine in the Spinney; but for a guinea, if the weather should hold, so hot and so cold, we had better by far stay where we are. For the grass there grows, while nobody mows, (which is very wrong,) so rank and long, that so to speak, 'tis at least a week, if it happens to rain, ere it dries again.

I have writ *Charity*, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good; and if the Reviewer should say, "to be

¹ Succeeded Newton as curate at Olney.

² Scott was Page's successor.

³ Lady Austen.

sure, the gentleman's Muse, wears Methodist shoes; you may know by her pace, and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard, for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoidening play, of the modern day; and though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan, to catch if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production, on a new construction. She has baited her trap in hopes to snap all that may come, with a sugar-plum." — His opinion in this, will not be amiss; 'tis what I intend, my principal end; and if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid, for all I have said, and all I have done, though I have run, many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence, to the end of my sense, and 'by hook or crook, write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

I have heard before, of a room with a floor, laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art, in every part, that when you went in, you was forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in and now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe or string, or any such thing: and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what will make you dance, and as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I have penn'd: which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jigging about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me—

W. C.

P.S.—When I concluded, doubtless you did think me right, as well you might, in saying what I said of Scott; and then it was true, but now it is due, to him to note, that since I wrote, himself and he has visited we.

CCXCVIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 29, 1784.

It being his majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its

way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard Side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys halloo'd, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss¹ was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window, than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr. Grenville advancing toward me shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the Jess, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a riband from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked. Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the

¹ His tame hare.

adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former.¹ It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any, without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner perhaps was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them. . . .

Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our united love, we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs. Newton's affectionate and faithful

W. C.
M. U.

CCXCIX.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,

The Lodge, May 10, 1790.

You have by this time, I presume, heard from the Doctor, whom I desired to present to you our best affections, and to tell you that we are well. He sent an urchin, (I do not mean a hedge-hog, commonly called an urchin in old times, but a boy, commonly so called at present,) expecting that he would find you at Bucklands, whither he supposed you gone on Thursday. He sent him charged with divers articles, and among others with letters, or at least with a letter; which I mention, that if the boy should be lost, together with his dispatches, past all possibility of recovery, you may yet know that the Doctor stands acquitted of not writing. That he is utterly lost, (that is to say, the boy, for the Doctor being the last antecedent, as the grammarians say, you might otherwise suppose that he was intended,) is the more probable, because he was never four miles from his home before, having only travelled at the side of a plough-team; and when the Doctor gave him his direction

¹ He was one of Pitt's supporters. Cowper, being a Whig, favoured the Opposition led by Fox and North.

to Bucklands, he asked, very naturally, if that place was in England. So what has become of him Heaven knows!

I do not know that any adventures have presented themselves since your departure worth mentioning, except that the rabbit, that infested your wilderness, has been shot for devouring your carnations; and that I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog, viz. Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday, (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to his dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes—for the said last antecedent might occasion them in this place also,) informing him, that unless he tied up his great mastiff in the day-time, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields, I do not sally like Don Quixote, with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found; but am a peaceable poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm,—the foxhunters and the two universities of this land excepted.

I cannot learn from any creature whether the Turnpike Bill is alive or dead;—so ignorant am I, and by such ignoramuses surrounded. But if I know little else, this at least I know, that I love you, and Mr. Frog; that I long for your return, and that I am with Mrs. Unwin's best affections,

Ever yours,

W. C.

CCC.

TO MRS. NEWTON

DEAR MADAM,

June 1780.

When I write to Mr. Newton, he answers me by letter; when I write to you, you answer me in fish. I return you many thanks for the mackerel and lobster. They assured me in terms as intelligible as pen and ink could have spoken, that you still remember Orchard Side; and though they never spoke in their lives, and it was still less to be expected from them that they should speak, being dead, they gave us an assurance of your affection that corresponds exactly with that which Mr. Newton expresses towards us in all his letters.—For my own part, I never in my life began a letter more at a venture than the present. It is possible that I may finish it, but perhaps more than probable that I shall not. I have had several indifferent nights, and the wind is easterly; two circumstances so unfavourable to me in all my occupations, but especially that of writing.

that it was with the greatest difficulty I could even bring myself to attempt it.

You have never yet perhaps been made acquainted with the unfortunate Tom Freeman's misadventure. He and his wife returning from Hanslip fair, were coming down Weston Lane; to wit, themselves, their horse, and their great wooden panniers, at ten o'clock at night. The horse having a lively imagination, and very weak nerves, fancied he either saw or heard something, but has never been able to say what! A sudden fright will impart activity, and a momentary vigour, even to lameness itself. Accordingly, he started, and sprung from the middle of the road to the side of it, with such surprising alacrity, that he dismounted the gingerbread baker and his gingerbread wife in a moment. Not contented with this effort, nor thinking himself yet out of danger, he proceeded as fast as he could to a full gallop, rushed against the gate at the bottom of the lane, and opened it for himself, without perceiving that there was any gate there. Still he galloped, and with a velocity and momentum continually increasing, till he arrived in Olney. I had been in bed about ten minutes, when I heard the most uncommon and unaccountable noise that can be imagined. It was, in fact, occasioned by the clattering of tin patty-pans and a Dutch-oven against the sides of the panniers. Much gingerbread was picked up in the street, and Mr. Lucy's windows were broken all to pieces. Had this been all, it would have been a comedy, but we learned the next morning, that the poor woman's collar-bone was broken, and she has hardly been able to resume her occupation since. . . .

Yours, dear Madam,

WM. COWPER.

CCCI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 17, 1783.

The country around is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened, since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds; and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated, as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; Sue

Riviss, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing-apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had Billy Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he goodnaturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable Hlinschcomb, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver End, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazonian tury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for some left-off clothes. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will

not heat him much ; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

XIV. REFERENCES TO CURRENT HISTORICAL EVENTS

For a recluse, Cowper took a considerable interest in national affairs, and his letters contain very many references to events of supreme historical importance. The greater part of his correspondence belongs to one of the most critical periods in English history. The American War of Independence, due to the short-sighted policy of incompetent ministers, brought disastrous consequences in its train; after varying fortunes, England suffered a heavy blow when General Burgoyne was forced to surrender at Saratoga in October 1777. France thought the moment opportune for a decisive blow against her old enemy, and declared war the next year; she was followed by Spain in 1778, and Holland two years later. This same year (1780) saw almost all the powers of Europe arrayed against England in an Armed Neutrality, so that Cowper, writing in the December, truly said:

"The nations hunt; all mark thee for a prey,
They swarm around thee, and thou stand'st at bay."

Table Talk, 364-5.

At home, too, the outlook was very black. The attempts to grant partial emancipation to the Catholics were met with great hostility culminating in the celebrated Gordon Riots, when:

"The rude rabble's watchword was 'Destroy!'
And blazing London seemed a second Troy."

Ibid., 323-4.

Meanwhile the American War pursued its disastrous course. Lord Cornwallis was victorious for a time and his last success, at Guildford Court House, led Cowper and many others to believe that "rebellion must soon be extinguished, crippled by defeat and destitute of resources." But, within a few months, the final crushing defeat of the English forces took place at Yorktown, and the mother country was forced to recognise the independence of the United States in 1782. The next year she accepted the Treaty of Versailles with France and Spain on terms that aroused Cowper's indignation.¹

Great Britain now seemed to have lost her pride of place, but she was to regain it to a great extent under the political leadership of the Younger Pitt, who, after much opposition, became Prime Minister in 1784 and remained in office until the year following Cowper's death. Like many others, the poet was pessimistic over the country's being "trusted to a schoolboy's care" (Pitt was only twenty-four years of age), but he learned to respect him, and in 1787 we find him describing the young statesman as one of the "two greatest names of the present age." Among Pitt's earliest measures was an India Bill which gave the Crown supreme authority over the East India Company. This reform met with the thorough

¹ See Letter No. CCCXV.

approval of Cowper, who was one of those that believed the Company to be avaricious and oppressive in its dealings with the natives

"A despot big with power obtained by wealth,
And that obtained by rapine and by stealth."

Expostulation, 370-1.

He took a great interest in the trial of Warren Hastings chiefly because they were schoolfellows at Westminster, and he was confirmed "in the belief that Hastings has been injuriously treated":

"Nor can I well believe thee, gentle then,
Now grown a villain, and the worst of men "

Lines to Warren Hastings.

The trial, which dragged on for six years, aroused considerable public attention at the onset, but the final stages found all eyes focused on one of the greatest events in the world's history--the French Revolution. During the earlier days, Cowper was as full of enthusiasm as Wordsworth--the enthusiasm that one would expect from the poet who wrote of the Bastille with almost prophetic insight more than five years before the fateful 14 July, 1789.

"There's not an English heart that would not leap
To hear that ye were fallen at last, to know
That even our enemies, so oft employed
In forging chains for us, themselves were free "

The Task, V 389-92

But the excesses of the mob alienated the sympathies of both poets. "They are a terrible race," Cowper wrote in 1793, "and I have a horror both of them and their principles." At the same time he deprecated foreign interference in the Revolution. "All nations have a right to choose their own mode of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself; for whenever the people choose to be masters they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have a reform, we certainly shall." Cowper then goes on to stress the need of concessions to "dissenters of every denomination"--concessions which were not fully granted until the next century.

I. THE AMERICAN WAR

(LETTERS CCCII--CCXVI.)

CCCH.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

REVEREND AND DEAR WILLIAM,

June 18, 1780

The affairs of kingdoms, and the concerns of individuals, are variegated alike with the chequer-work of joy and sorrow. The news of a great acquisition in America has succeeded to terrible tumults in London¹; and the beams of prosperity are now playing upon the smoke of that conflagration which so lately terrified the whole land. These sudden changes, which are matter of every man's observation, and may therefore always be reasonably expected, serve to hold up the chin of despondency above water, and preserve mankind in general from the sin and

¹ The Gordon Riots.

misery of accounting existence a burden not to be endured;—an evil we should be sure to encounter, if we were not warranted to look for a bright reverse of our most afflictive experiences.

We are obliged to you for your early communication of the surrender of Charles Town,¹ and rejoice with you in an event, which, if my political spectacles do not deceive me, is likely to bring the rebellion to a speedy end. The Spaniards were sick of the war at the very commencement of it; and I hope that, by this time, the French themselves begin to find themselves a little indisposed, if not desirous of peace, which that restless and meddling temper of theirs is incapable of desiring for its own sake. But is it true, that this detestable plot was an egg laid in France and hatched in London, under the influence of French corruption?—*Nam te scire, deos quoniam propius contingis, oportet.* The offspring has the features of such a parent; and yet, without the clearest proof of the fact, I would not willingly charge upon a civilised nation what perhaps the most barbarous would abhor the thought of. I no sooner saw the surmise however in the paper, than I immediately began to write Latin verses upon the occasion.* “An odd effect,” you will say, “of such a circumstance”:—but an effect, nevertheless, that whatever has, at any time, moved my passions whether pleasantly or otherwise, has always had upon me: were I to express what I feel upon such occasions in prose, it would be verbose, inflated, and disgusting. I therefore have recourse to verse, as a suitable vehicle for the most vehement expressions my thoughts suggest to me. What I have written, I did not write so much for the comfort of the English, as for the mortification of the French. You will immediately perceive, therefore, that I have been labouring in vain, and that this bouncing explosion is likely to spend itself in the air. For I have no means of circulating what follows through all the French territories; and unless that, or something like it, can be done, my indignation will be entirely fruitless. Tell me how I can convey it into Sartine’s pocket, or who will lay it upon his desk for me. But read it first, and unless you think it pointed enough to sting the Gaul to the quick, burn it.

*In seditionem horrendam, corruptelis Gallicis, ut fertur, Londini
nuper exortam*

Perfida, crudelis, victa et lymphata furore,
Non arms, laurum Gallia fraude petit
Venalein pretio plebem conducit, et urit
Undique privatas patriciasque domos.

The victory of the English under Cornwallis.

Nequicquàm conata suâ, fœdissima sperat
 Posse tamen nostrâ nos superare manu.
 Gallia, vana struis! Precibus nunc utere! Vinces,
 Nam mites timidis, supplicibusque sumus.¹

I have lately exercised my ingenuity in contriving an exercise for yours, and have composed a riddle, which, if it does not make you laugh before you have solved it, will probably do it afterwards. I would transcribe it now, but am really so fatigued with writing, that unless I knew you had a quinsy, and that a fit of laughter might possibly save your life, I could not prevail with myself to do it.

What could you possibly mean, slender as you are, by sallying out upon your two walking-sticks at two in the morning, into the midst of such a tumult? We admire your prowess, but cannot commend your prudence.

Our love attends you all, collectively and individually.

Yours,
 W. C.

CCCIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

July 11, 1780

. . . I account myself sufficiently commended for my Latin exercise, by the number of translations it has undergone. That which you distinguished in the margin by the word "better," was the production of a friend; and, except that for a modest reason he omitted the third couplet, I think it is a good one. To finish the group, I have translated it myself; and though I would not wish you to give it to the world, for more reasons than one, especially lest some French hero should call me to an account for it,—I add it on the other side. An author ought to be the best judge of his own meaning; and whether I have succeeded or not, I cannot but wish, that where a translator is wanted, the writer was always to be his own.

False, cruel, disappointed, stung to the heart,
 France quits the warrior's for the assassin's part *;
 To dirty hands, a dirty bribe conveys,
 Bids the low street and lofty palace blaze.
 Her sons too weak to vanquish us alone,
 She hires the worst and basest of our own.
 Kneel, France! a suppliant conquers us with ease;
 We always spare a coward on his knees. . . .

W. C.

¹ See next letter for the translation.

* Her supposed complicity in the Gordon Riots.

CCCIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 9, 1780.

I wrote the following last summer. The tragical occasion of it really happened at the next house to ours. I am glad when I can find a subject to work upon; a lapidary I suppose accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone; but it is my amusement, and if after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains.¹

I shall charge you a halfpenny a-piece for every copy I send you, the short as well as the long. This is a sort of afterclap you little expected, but I cannot possibly afford them at a cheaper rate. If this method of raising money had occurred to me sooner, I should have made the bargain sooner; but am glad I have hit upon it at last. It will be a considerable encouragement to my muse, and act as a powerful stimulus to my industry. If the American war should last much longer, I may be obliged to raise my price; but this I shall not do without a real occasion for it:—it depends much upon Lord North's pretty conduct in the article of supplies.² If he imposes an additional tax on anything that I deal in, the necessity of this measure, on my part, will be so apparent, that I dare say you will not dispute it.

Your mother desires me to add her love to mine, which waits on you all as usual. She is much pleased with your desire to hear from her, but having such an industrious secretary in me, she thought it the less necessary. She will use her own hand, however, when her nerves, which are seldom well strung, and which this turbulent weather particularly discomposes, will give her leave.

W. C.

CCCV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 13, 1781.

. . . This last victory over the Americans³ will go near to verify my poetical prediction, and Sir Joshua will have nothing to do but to record the completion of a prophecy which is the more respectable, because when first delivered, it seemed so very improbable. Rebellion it should seem must soon be extinguished, crippled by defeat and destitute of resources, and

¹ Verses on a Goldfinch starved to death in a cage.

² The incompetent Prime Minister of the day.

³ The victory of Cornwallis at Guildford Court House on 15 March, 1781.

extinction of the war will soon follow it. I have taken prudent care however to save my credit at all events, and having foretold both fair weather and foul, the former in the piece just alluded to, and the latter in *Expostulation*, fall back, fall edge, as they say, like the Newton-shepherds, my soothsaying is sure to be accomplished.

There is, I am afraid. a perverseness and persevering spirit of opposition to Mr. Scott, that will grieve you, though you will not suffer it to disturb your temper. Mr. Scott acts wisely, and takes no notice of it either in conversation with the people or in the pulpit.

The ducks could not be pulled, because it was necessary they should be killed on a Sunday.

Yours. my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton's,
WM. COWPER.

CCCVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

. . . I see but one feature in the face of our national concerns that pleases me:—the war with America, it seems, is to be conducted on a different plan. This is something; when a long series of measures, of a certain description, has proved unsuccessful, the adoption of others is at least pleasing, as it encourages a hope that they may possibly prove wiser, and more effectual; but, indeed, without discipline, all is lost. Pitt himself¹ could have done nothing with such tools; but he would not have been so betrayed; he would have made the traitors answer with their heads, for their cowardice or supineness, and their punishment would have made survivors active.

W. C.

CCCVII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 27, 1781.

First Mr. Wilson, then Mr. Teedon, and lastly Mr. Whitford, each with a cloud of melancholy on his brow, and with a mouth wide open, have just announced to us this unwelcome intelligence from America.² We are sorry to hear it, and should be more cast down than we are, if we did not know that this catastrophe was

¹ "Once Chatham saved thee, but who saves thee next?"—*Table Talk*, 367.

² Cornwallis had capitulated the previous month at Yorktown.

ordained beforehand, and that therefore neither conduct, nor courage, nor any means that can possibly be mentioned, could have prevented it. If the King and his ministry can be contented to close the business here, and, taking poor Dean Tucker's advice, resign the Americans into the hands of their new masters, it may be well for Old England. But if they will still persevere, they will find it, I doubt, an hopeless contest to the last. Domestic murmurs will grow louder, and the hands of faction, being strengthened by this late miscarriage, will find it easy to set fire to the pile of combustibles they have been so long employed in building. These are my politics; and for aught I can see, you and we by our respective firesides, though neither connected with men in power, nor professing to possess any share of that sagacity which thinks itself qualified to wield the affairs of kingdoms, can make as probable conjectures, and look forward into futurity with as clear a sight, as the greatest man in the cabinet. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir, as ever,
W. C.

CCCVIII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 9, 1781.

Having returned you many thanks for the fine cod and oysters you favoured me with, though it is now morning I will suppose it afternoon, that you and I dined together, are comfortably situated by a good fire, and just entering on a sociable conversation. You speak first, because I am a man of few words.

Well, Cowper, what do you think of this American war?

I. To say the truth I am not very fond of thinking about it; when I do, I think of it unpleasantly enough. I think it bids fair to be the ruin of the country.

You. That's very unpleasant indeed! If that should be the consequence, it will be the fault of those who might put a stop to it if they would.

I. But do you really think that practicable?

You. Why not? If people leave off fighting, peace follows of course. I wish they would withdraw the forces and put an end to the squabble.

Now I am going to make a long speech.

I. You know the complexion of my sentiments upon some subjects well enough, and that I do not look upon public events either as fortuitous, or absolutely derivable either from the

wisdom or folly of man. These indeed operate as second causes; but we must look for the cause of the decline or the prosperity of an empire elsewhere. I have long since done complaining of men and measures, having learned to consider them merely as the instruments of a higher Power, by which He either bestows wealth, peace, and dignity upon a nation when He favours it; or by which He strips it of all those honours, when public enormities long persisted in provoke Him to inflict a public punishment. The counsels of great men become as foolish and preposterous when He is pleased to make them so, as those of the frantic creatures in Bedlam, when they lay their distracted heads together to consider the state of the nation. But I go still further. The wisdom, or the want of wisdom, that we observe or think we observe in those that rule us, entirely out of the question, I cannot look upon the circumstances of this country, without being persuaded that I discern in them an entanglement and perplexity that I have never met with in the history of any other, which I think preternatural (if I may use the word on such a subject), prodigious in its kind, and such as human sagacity can never remedy. I have a good opinion of the understanding and integrity of some in power, yet I see plainly that they are unequal to the task. I think as favourably of some that are not in power, yet I am sure they have never yet in any of their speeches recommended the plan that would effect the salutary purpose. If we pursue the war, it is because we are desperate; it is plunging and sinking year after year into still greater depths of calamity. If we relinquish it, the remedy is equally desperate, and would prove I believe in the end no remedy at all. Either way we are undone. Perseverance will only enfeeble us more; we cannot recover the colonies by arms. If we discontinue the attempt, in that case we fling away voluntarily what in the other we strove ineffectually to regain; and whether we adopt the one measure or the other, are equally undone: for I consider the loss of America as the ruin of England. Were we less encumbered than we are at home, we could but ill afford it; but being crushed as we are under an enormous debt that the public credit can at no rate carry much longer, the consequence is sure. Thus it appears to me that we are squeezed to death, between the two sides of that sort of alternative which is commonly called a cleft stick, the most threatening and portentous condition in which the interests of any country can possibly be found.

I think I have done pretty well for a man of few words, and

have contrived to have all the talk to myself. I thank you for not interrupting me.

Yours, my dear Friend,
WM. COWPER.

CCCIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The shortest day, 1781.

I might easily make this letter a continuation of my last, another national miscarriage having furnished me with a fresh illustration of the remarks we have both been making. Mr. Smith, who has most obligingly supplied me with franks throughout my whole concern with Johnson, accompanied the last parcel he sent me with a note dated from the House of Commons, in which he seemed happy to give me the earliest intelligence of the capture of the French transports by Admiral Kempenfelt, and of a close engagement between the two fleets, so much to be expected. This note was written on Monday, and reached me by Wednesday's post; but, alas! the same post brought us the newspaper that informed us of his being forced to fly before a much superior enemy, and glad to take shelter in the port he had left so lately. This event, I suppose, will have worse consequences than the mere disappointment; will furnish opposition, as all our ill success has done, with the fuel of dissension, and with the means of thwarting and perplexing administration. Thus all we purchase with the many millions expended yearly, is distress to ourselves, instead of our enemies, and domestic quarrels, instead of victories abroad. It takes a great many blows to knock down a great nation; and, in the case of poor England, a great many heavy ones have not been wanting. They make us reel and stagger, indeed; but the blow is not yet struck that is to make us fall upon our knees. That fall would save us; but if we fall upon our side at last, we are undone. So much for politics. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir,

W. C.

CCCX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The last day of 1781.

. . . I consider England and America as once one country. They were so, in respect of interest, intercourse, and affinity. A great earthquake has made a partition, and now the Atlantic ocean flows between them. He that can drain that ocean, and shove the two shores together, so as to make them aptly coincide,

and meet each other in every part, can unite them again. But this is a work for Omnipotence, and nothing less than Omnipotence can heal the breach between us. This dispensation is evidently a scourge to England;—but is it a blessing to America? Time may prove it one, but at present it does not seem to wear an aspect favourable to their privileges, either civil or religious. I cannot doubt the truth of Dr. W.'s assertion; but the French, who pay but little regard to treaties that clash with their convenience, without a treaty, and even in direct contradiction to verbal engagements, can easily pretend a claim to a country which they have both bled and paid for; and if the validity of that claim be disputed, behold an army ready landed, and well-appointed, and in possession of some of the most fruitful provinces, prepared to prove it. A scourge is a scourge at one end only. A bundle of thunderbolts, such as you have seen in the talons of Jupiter's eagle, is at both ends equally tremendous, and can inflict a judgement upon the West, at the same moment that it seems to intend only the chastisement of the East. . . .

Our joint love attends you both. We rejoice to hear that Mrs. Newton is better.

Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

CCCXI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

JAN. 13, 1782

. . . I believe I did not thank you for your anecdotes, either foreign or domestic, in my last, therefore I do it now; and still feel myself, as I did at the time, truly obliged to you for them. More is to be learned from one matter of fact than from a thousand speculations. But, alas! what course can government take? I have heard (for I never made the experiment) that if a man grasp a red-hot iron with his naked hand, it will stick to him, so that he cannot presently disengage himself from it. Such are the colonies in the hands of administration. While they hold them they burn their fingers, and yet they must not quit them. I know not whether your sentiments and mine upon this part of the subject exactly coincide, but you will know, when you understand what mine are. It appears to me, that the King is bound, both by the duty he owes to himself and to his people, to consider himself with respect to every inch of his territories, as a trustee deriving his interest in them from God, and invested with them by divine authority for the benefit of his subjects. As he may not sell them or waste them, so

he may not resign them to an enemy, or transfer his right to govern them to any, not even to themselves, so long as it is possible for him to keep it. If he does, he betrays at once his own interest, and that of his other dominions. It may be said, suppose Providence has ordained that they shall be wrested from him, how then? I answer, that cannot appear to be the case, till God's purpose is actually accomplished; and in the mean time the most probable prospect of such an event does not release him from his obligation to hold them to the last moment, for as much as adverse appearances are no infallible indication of God's designs, but may give place to more comfortable symptoms, when we least expect it. Viewing the thing in this light, if I sat on his majesty's throne, I should be as obstinate as he; because if I quitted the contest, while I had any means left of carrying it on, I should never know that I had not relinquished what I might have retained, or be able to render a satisfactory answer to the doubts and inquiries of my own conscience. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir,

W. C.

CCCXII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 6, 1782

The tempting occasion of a basket directed to you, seldom fails to produce a letter; not that I have any thing to say, but because I can say any thing, therefore, I seize the present opportunity to address you. Some subject will be sure to present itself, and the first that offers shall be welcome.

Is peace the nearer because our patriots¹ have resolved that it is desirable? Will the victory they have gained in the House of Commons be attended with any other consequences than the mortification of the King, the embarrassment of ministry, and perhaps Lord North's resignation? Do they expect the same success on other occasions, and having once gained a majority, are they to be the majority for ever?—These are the questions we agitate by the fireside in an evening, without being able to come to any certain conclusion, partly I suppose because the subject is in itself uncertain, and partly because we are not furnished with the means of understanding it. I find the politics

¹ Cowper uses the term to mean the Opposition party in Parliament, which was in sympathy with the American colonists.

"Patriots bursting with heroic rage."

The Task, IV. 48.

of times past far more intelligible than those of the present. Time has thrown light upon what was obscure, and decided what was ambiguous. The characters of great men, which are always mysterious while they live, are ascertained by the faithful historian, and sooner or later receive their wages of fame or infamy, according to their true deserts. How have I seen sensible and learned men burn incense to the memory of Oliver Cromwell, ascribing to him, as the greatest hero of the world, the dignity of the British empire during the interregnum. A century passed before that idol, which seemed to be of gold, was proved to be a wooden one. . . .

Yours, my dear Sir,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 27, 1782.

. . . The blow we have struck in the West Indies¹ will, I suppose, be decisive at least for the present year, and so far as that part of our possessions is concerned in the present conflict. But the news-writers, and their correspondents, disgust me, and make me sick. One victory after such a long series of adverse occurrences has filled them with self-conceit, and impertinent boasting; and while Rodney is almost accounted a methodist, for ascribing his success to Providence, men who have renounced all dependence upon such a friend, without whose assistance nothing can be done, threaten to drive the French out of the sea, laugh at the Spaniards, sneer at the Dutch, and are to carry the world before them. Our enemies are apt to brag, and we deride them for it; but we can sing as loud as they can, in the same key, and no doubt wherever our papers go, shall be derided in our turn. An Englishman's true glory should be, to do his business well, and say little about it; but he disgraces himself when he puffs his prowess as if he had finished his task, when he has but just begun it.

Yours,

W. C.

CCCXIV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Jan. 26, 1783.

It is reported among persons of the best intelligence at Olney—the barber, the schoolmaster, and the drummer of a corps quartered at this place—that the belligerent powers

¹ Rodney's victory off St. Lucia on 12 April.

are at last reconciled, the articles of the treaty adjusted, and that peace is at the door.¹ I saw this morning, at nine o'clock, a group of about twelve figures very closely engaged in a conference, as I suppose, upon the same subject. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed, very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their bosom, and others had thrust them into their breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind; but the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not, perhaps, equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it. The powers of Europe have clashed with each other to a fine purpose; that the Americans, at length declared independent, may keep themselves so, if they can; and that what the parties, who have thought proper to dispute upon that point, have wrested from each other in the course of the conflict, may be, in the issue of it, restored to the proper owner. Nations may be guilty of a conduct that would render an individual infamous for ever; and yet carry their heads high, talk of their glory, and despise their neighbours. Your opinions and mine, I mean our political ones, are not exactly of a piece, yet I cannot think otherwise upon this subject than I have always done. England, more, perhaps, through the fault of her generals, than her councils, has in some instances acted with a spirit of cruel animosity she was never chargeable with till now. But this is the worst that can be said. On the other hand, the Americans, who, if they had contented themselves with a struggle for lawful liberty, would have deserved applause, seem to me to have incurred the guilt of parricide, by renouncing their parent, by making her ruin their favourite object, and by associating themselves with their worst enemy, for the accomplishment of their purpose. France, and of course Spain, have acted a treacherous, a thievish part. They have stolen America from England,² and whether they are able to possess themselves of that jewel or not hereafter, it was doubtless what they

¹ Peace was made in the following April.

² True, we have lost an empire—let it pass.
True, we may thank the perfidy of France
That picked the jewel out of England's crown.

The Task, II. 263-5.

intended. Holland appears to me in a meaner light than any of them. They quarrelled with a friend for an enemy's sake. The French led them by the nose, and the English have thrashed them for suffering it. My views of the contest being, and having been always such, I have consequently brighter hopes for England than her situation some time since seemed to justify. She is the only injured party. America may, perhaps, call her the aggressor; but if she were so, America has not only repelled the injury, but done a greater. As to the rest, if perfidy, treachery, avarice, and ambition, can prove their cause to have been a rotten one, those proofs are found upon them. I think, therefore, that whatever scourge may be prepared for England, on some future day, her ruin is not yet to be expected.

Acknowledge, now, that I am worthy of a place under the shed I described, and that I should make no small figure among the *quidnuncs* of Olney. . . .

Yours, my dear Friend, as ever,

W. C.

CCCXV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Feb. 2, 1783

I give you joy of the restoration of that sincere and firm friendship between the Kings of England and France, that has been so long interrupted. It is great pity, when hearts so cordially united are divided by trifles. Thirteen pitiful colonies, which the King of England chose to keep, and the King of France to obtain, if he could, have disturbed that harmony which would else, no doubt, have subsisted between those illustrious personages to this moment. If the King of France, whose greatness of mind is only equalled by that of his Queen, had regarded them, unworthy of his notice as they were, with an eye of suitable indifference; or, had he thought it a matter deserving in any degree his princely attention, that they were, in reality, the property of his good friend the King of England; or, had the latter been less obstinately determined to hold fast his interest in them; and could he, with that civility and politeness in which monarchs are expected to excel, have entreated his Majesty of France to accept a bagatelle, for which he seemed to have conceived so strong a predilection, all this mischief had been prevented. But monarchs, alas! crowned and sceptred as they are, are yet but men; they fall out, and are reconciled, just like the meanest of their subjects. I cannot, however,

sufficiently admire the moderation and magnanimity of the King of England. His dear friend on the other side of the channel has not indeed taken actual possession of the colonies in question, but he has effectually wrested them out of the hands of their original owner; who, nevertheless, letting fall the extinguisher of patience upon the flame of his resentment, and glowing with no other flame than that of the sincerest affection, embraces the King of France again, gives him Senegal and Goree in Africa, gives him the islands he had taken from him in the West, gives him his conquered territories in the East, gives him a fishery upon the banks of Newfoundland; and, as if all this were too little, merely because he knows that Louis has a partiality for the King of Spain, gives to the latter an island in the Mediterranean, which thousands of English had purchased with their lives; and, in America, all that he wanted, at least all that he could ask.¹ No doubt there will be great cordiality between this royal trio for the future: and though wars may perhaps be kindled between their posterity, some ages hence, the present generation shall never be witnesses of such a calamity again. I expect soon to hear that the Queen of France, who, just before this rupture happened, made the Queen of England a present of a watch, has, in acknowledgment of all these acts of kindness, sent her also a seal wherewith to ratify the treaty. Surely she can do no less.

W. C.

CCCXVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb. 24, 1783

A weakness in one of my eyes may possibly shorten my letter, but I mean to make it as long as my present materials, and my ability to write, can suffice for.

I am almost sorry to say that I am reconciled to the peace, being reconciled to it not upon principles of approbation, but necessity. The deplorable condition of the country, insisted on by the friends of administration, and not denied by their adversaries, convinces me that our only refuge under Heaven was in the treaty with which I quarrelled. The treaty itself I find less objectionable than I did, Lord Shelburne having given a colour to some of the articles that makes them less painful in the contemplation. But my opinion upon the whole affair is, that now is the time (if indeed there is salvation for the country) for

¹ These are some of the terms in the Treaty of Versailles (Sept. 1783).

Providence to interpose to save it. A peace with the greatest political advantages would not have healed us; a peace with none may procrastinate our ruin for a season, but cannot ultimately prevent it. The prospect may make all tremble who have no trust in God, and even they that trust may tremble. The peace will probably be of short duration; and, in the ordinary course of things, another war must end us. A great country in ruins will not be beheld with eyes of indifference, even by those who have a better country to look to. But with them all will be well at last.

As to the Americans, perhaps I do not forgive them as I ought; perhaps I shall always think of them with some resentment as the destroyers,—intentionally the destroyers, of this country. They have pushed that point farther than the house of Bourbon could have carried it in half a century. I may be prejudiced against them, but I do not think them equal to the task of establishing an empire. Great men are necessary for such a purpose; and their great men, I believe, are yet unborn. They have had passion and obstinacy enough to do us much mischief; but whether the event will be salutary to themselves or not, must wait for proof. I agree with you, that it is possible America may become a land of extraordinary evangelical light; but, at the same time, I cannot discover anything in their new situation peculiarly favourable to such a supposition. They cannot have more liberty of conscience than they had; at least, if that liberty was under any restraint, it was a restraint of their own making. Perhaps a new settlement in church and state may leave them less. Well,—all will be over soon. The time is at hand when an empire will be established that shall fill the earth. Neither statesmen nor generals will lay the foundation of it, but it shall rise at the sound of the trumpet. . . .

Yours, my dear friend, truly,

W. C.

2. COOK'S VOYAGES

(LETTERS CCCXVII.—CCCXVIII.)

Whilst the American colonies were being lost to England, Captain Cook was making discoveries that were to add to the Empire other mighty "realms that Cæsar never knew." Cowper was keenly interested in the voyages, but he apparently misunderstood the explorer's character (see footnote to the second letter).

CCCXVII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

August 16, 1784.

. . . I am reading Cook's last voyage, and am much pleased and amused with it. It seems that in some of the Friendly isles, they excel so much in dancing, and perform that operation with such exquisite delicacy and grace, that they are not surpassed even upon our European stages. O! that Vestris had been in the ship, that he might have seen himself outdone by a savage. The paper indeed tells us that the Queen of France has clapped this king of capers up in prison, for declining to dance before her, on a pretence of sickness, when in fact he was in perfect health. If this be true, perhaps he may by this time be prepared to second such a wish as mine, and to think that the durance he suffers would be well exchanged for a dance at Anamooka. I should, however, as little have expected to hear that these islanders had such consummate skill in an art, that requires so much taste in the conduct of the person, as that they were good mathematicians and astronomers. Defective as they are in every branch of knowledge, and in every other species of refinement, it seems wonderful that they should arrive at such perfection in the dance, which some of our English gentlemen, with all the assistance of French instruction, find it impossible to learn. We must conclude therefore that particular nations have a genius for particular feats; and that our neighbours in France, and our friends in the South Sea, have minds very nearly akin, though they inhabit countries so very remote from each other. . . .

Your affectionate friend,

W. C.

CCCXVIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

October 9, 1784.

. . . Last night I had a letter from Lord Dartmouth. It was to apprise me of the safe arrival of Cook's last voyage, which

he was so kind as to lend me, in Saint James's Square. He writes, however, from Sandwell. The reading of those volumes afforded me much amusement, and I hope some instruction. No observation, however, forced itself upon me with more violence than one, that I could not help making on the death of Captain Cook. God is a jealous God, and at Owwhyhee the poor man was content to be worshipped. From that moment, the remarkable interposition of Providence in his favour was converted into an opposition, that thwarted all his purposes. He left the scene of his deification, but was driven back to it by a most violent storm, in which he suffered more than in any that had preceded it. When he departed he left his worshippers still infatuated with an idea of his godship, consequently well disposed to serve him. At his return he found them sullen, distrustful, and mysterious. A trifling theft was committed, which, by a blunder of his own in pursuing the thief after the property had been restored, was magnified into an affair of the last importance. One of their favourite chiefs was killed too by a blunder. Nothing, in short, but blunder and mistake attended him, till he fell breathless into the water, and then all was smooth again.¹ The world indeed will not take notice, or see, that the dispensation bore evident marks of divine displeasure; but a mind I think in any degree spiritual cannot overlook them. We know from truth itself, that the death of Herod was for a similar offence. But Herod was in no sense a believer in God, nor had enjoyed half the opportunities with which our poor countryman had been favoured. It may be urged perhaps that he was in jest, that he meant nothing but his own amusement, and that of his companions. I doubt it. He knows little of the heart, who does not know that even in a sensible man it is flattered by every species of exaltation. But be it so, that he was in sport:—it was not humane, to say no worse of it, to sport with the ignorance of his friends, to mock their simplicity, to humour and acquiesce in their blind credulity. Besides, though a stock or a stone may be worshipped blameless, a baptised man may not. He knows what he does, and by suffering such honours to be paid him, incurs the guilt of sacrilege.²

¹ When Cook—lamented and with tears as just
As ever mingled with heroic dust—

² Steered Britain's oak into a world unknown,
And in his country's glory sought his own.

Charity, 23–6.

³ Having enjoyed, in the year 1772, the pleasure of conversing with this illustrious seaman, on board his own ship, the *Resolution*, I cannot pass

We are glad that you are so happy in your church, in your society, and in all your connexions. I have not left myself room to say anything of the love we feel for you.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

3. THE GORDON RIOTS

(LETTERS CCCXIX.—CCCXXI.)

CCCXIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

DEAR SIR,

June 12, 1780

We accept it as an effort of your friendship, that you could prevail with yourself, in a time of such terror and distress, to send us repeated accounts of yours and Mrs. Newton's welfare; you supposed, with reason enough, that we should be apprehensive for your safety, situated as you were, apparently, within the reach of so much danger. We rejoice that you have escaped it all, and that, except the anxiety which you must have felt, both for yourselves and others, you have suffered nothing upon this dreadful occasion. A metropolis in flames, and a nation in ruins, are subjects of contemplation for such a mind as yours that will leave a lasting impression behind them. It is well that the design died in the execution, and will be buried, I hope never to rise again, in the ashes of its own combustion. There is a melancholy pleasure in looking back upon such a scene, arising from a comparison of possibilities with facts; the enormous bulk of the intended mischief with the abortive and partial accomplishment of it. Much was done, more indeed than could have been supposed practicable in a well-regulated city, not unfurnished with a military force for its protection. But surprise and astonishment seem at first to have struck every nerve of the police with a palsy, and to have disarmed government of all its powers.

I congratulate you upon the wisdom that withheld you from the present letter without observing, that I am persuaded my friend Cowper utterly misapprehended the behaviour of Captain Cook, in the affair alluded to. From the little personal acquaintance, which I had myself with this humane and truly Christian navigator, and from the whole tenor of his life, I cannot believe it possible for him to have acted, under any circumstances, with such impious arrogance, as might appear offensive in the eyes of the Almighty.—*Hayley.*

entering yourself a member of the Protestant association.¹ Your friends who did so have reason enough to regret their doing it, even though they should never be called upon. Innocent as they are, and they who know them cannot doubt of their being perfectly so, it is likely to bring an odium on the profession they make, that will not soon be forgotten. Neither is it possible for a quiet, inoffensive man, to discover, on a sudden, that his zeal has carried him into such company, without being to the last degree shocked at his imprudence. *Their* religion was an honourable mantle, like that of Elijah; but the majority wore cloaks of Guy Fawkes's time, and meant nothing so little as what they pretended.

W. C.

CCCXX.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,

July 20, 1780

. . . Remote as your dwelling is from the late scene of riot and confusion, I hope that though you could not but hear the report, you heard no more, and that the roarings of the mad multitude did not reach you. That was a day of terror to the innocent, and the present is a day of still greater terror to the guilty. The law was for a few moments like an arrow in the quiver, seemed to be of no use, and did no execution; now it is an arrow upon the string, and many, who despised it lately, are trembling as they stand before the point of it.

I have talked more already than I have formerly done in three visits:—you remember my taciturnity, never to be forgotten by those who knew me. Not to depart entirely from what might be, for aught I know, the most shining part of my character, I here shut my mouth, make my bow, and return to Olney.

W. C.

CCCXXI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Feb. 4, 1781

. . . We wait with some impatience for the issue of Lord George's trial. Somebody, late from London, has brought hither the news that fresh disturbances are expected on the occasion, especially if he should be condemned: but what sort of patriotism is it, or what sort of zeal, that is offended when the laws of the country take their course?

¹ The supporters of Lord George Gordon

We are both pretty well. Mrs. Unwin joins with me in love to yourself and Mrs. Newton.

Yours, my dear Sir,

WM. COWPER.

4. WILLIAM PITT, THE YOUNGER

(LETTERS CCCXXII.—CCCXXV.)

CCCXXII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

February 1784.

. . . I will not apologise for my politics, or suspect them of error, merely because they are taken up from the newspapers. I take it for granted, that those reporters of the wisdom of our representatives are tolerably correct and faithful. Were they not, and were they guilty of frequent and gross misrepresentation, assuredly they would be chastised by the rod of parliamentary criticism. Could I be present at the debates, I should indeed have a better opinion of my documents. But if the House of Commons be the best school of British politics, which I think an undeniable assertion, then he that reads what passes there has opportunities of information, inferior only to theirs who hear for themselves, and can be present upon the spot. Thus qualified, I take courage; and when a certain reverend neighbour of ours curls his nose at me, and holds my opinions cheap, merely because he has passed through London, in his way to Wiltshire, I am not altogether convinced that he has reason on his side. I do not know that the air of the metropolis has a power to brighten the intellects, or that to sleep a night in the great city is a necessary cause of wisdom. He tells me that Mr. Fox is a rascal, and that Lord North¹ is a villain, that every creature execrates them both, and that I ought to do so too. But I beg to be excused. Villain and rascal are appellations which we, who do not converse with great men, are rather sparing in the use of. Neither can I persuade myself that because one of them has frequented the gaming table, and the other, after having been at the head of the court party, has associated with him, they are therefore traitors to their country, and fit only to be hanged. I can conceive them both to be most entirely persuaded of the rectitude of their conduct; and the rather,

¹ The Coalition Government of these two statesmen was just coming to an end. Pitt became Prime Minister in March.

because I feel myself much inclined to believe that, being so, they are not mistaken. I cannot think that secret influence is a bugbear, a phantom conjured up to serve a purpose; the mere *shibboleth* of a party. Stuartism, in my mind, has been the characteristic of the present reign; and being, and having always been somewhat of an enthusiast on the subject of British liberty, I am not able to withhold my reverence and good wishes from the man, whoever he be, that exerts himself in a constitutional way to oppose it. The son of Lord Chatham seems to me to have abandoned his father's principles. I admire neither his measures nor his temper; but very much admire the forbearance and lenity with which he is treated, and that consideration of his youth which men of equal ability, to say the least, and certainly of much greater experience, vouchsafe to show him. His obstinate continuance in office, with no better reason for it than an imaginary point of honour, is without example. It is *like* a young man either intoxicated with power, or implicitly, and at all hazards, executing the dictates of men more subtle and able than himself. I fear much that he is the tool of mischievous purposes, and that his unrelaxing steadiness, too much resembling that of a certain personage, will bring down a storm upon himself and upon the nation. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCCXXIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

July 3, 1784

. . . This change of wind and weather comforts me, and I should have enjoyed the first fine morning I have seen this month with a peculiar relish, if our new tax-fnaker had not put me out of temper. I am angry with him, not only for the matter, but for the manner of his proposal. When he lays his impost upon horses, he is even jocular, and laughs; though considering that wheels, and miles, and grooms, were taxed before, a graver countenance upon the occasion would have been more decent. But he provokes me still more by reasoning as he does on the justification of the tax upon candles. Some families, he says, will suffer little by it;—Why? Because they are so poor, that they cannot afford themselves more than ten pounds in the year. Excellent! They can use but few, therefore they will pay but little, and consequently will be but little burthened, an argument which for its cruelty and effrontery seems worthy of a hero; but he does not avail himself of the whole force of

it, nor with all his wisdom had sagacity enough to see that it contains, when pushed to its utmost extent, a free discharge and acquittal of the poor from the payment of any tax at all; a commodity, being once made too expensive for their pockets, will cost them nothing, for they will not buy it. Rejoice, therefore, O ye pennyless! the minister will indeed send you to bed in the dark, but your remaining halfpenny will be safe; instead of being spent in the useless luxury of candlelight, it will buy you a roll for breakfast, which you will eat no doubt with gratitude to the man who so kindly lessens the number of your disbursements, and while he seems to threaten your money, saves it. I wish he would remember, that the halfpenny, which government imposes, the shopkeeper will swell to two-pence. I wish he would visit the miserable huts of our lace-makers at Olney, and see them working in the winter months, by the light of a farthing candle,¹ from four in the afternoon till midnight. I wish he had laid his tax upon the ten thousand lamps that illuminate the Pantheon,² upon the flambeaux that wait upon ten thousand chariots and sedans in an evening, and upon the wax candles that give light to ten thousand card-tables. I wish, in short, that he would consider the pockets of the poor as sacred, and that to tax a people already so necessitous, is but to discourage the little industry that is left among us, by driving the laborious to despair.

A neighbour of mine, in Silver End, keeps an ass; the ass lives on the other side of the garden wall, and I am writing in the greenhouse: it happens that he is this morning most musically disposed, either cheered by the fine weather, or by some new tune which he has just acquired, or by finding his voice more harmonious than usual. It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me; but I venture to tell you so, and to plead his performance in excuse of my abrupt conclusion.

I send you the goldfinches, with which you will do as you see good. We have an affectionate remembrance of your late visit, and of all our friends at Stock.

Believe me ever yours,

W. C. *

¹ The taper soon extinguished, which I saw
Dangled along at the cold fingers' end
Just when the day declined.

The Task, IV. 391-3.

² The Pantheon, in Oxford Street, was then a favourite resort of the aristocracy. It rivalled Vauxhall and Ranelagh in popularity.

CCCXXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 8, 1787.

. . . I admire as much as you the spirit of our young minister. The Emperor and Pitt seem to be the two greatest names of the present age. They are both at present in circumstances that give them a noble opportunity to display their address, and we shall soon see how they will acquit themselves. If they can manage their respective difficulties without bloodshed, they will each deserve a statue. I entirely agree with you that the ardour of youth under the control of wisdom, are the two essentials to make a good minister. Were the old Duke of Newcastle now at the helm, the French party in Holland would carry all before them, and the French court would pull us by the nose. Sir Thomas, therefore, was right in his opinion, as indeed he generally was,—and in political matters, I believe, always. . . .

With Mrs. U.'s affectionate respects,

Yours, my dear, ever,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXV.

TO ROBERT SMITH, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston-Underwood, Dec 20, 1788

. . . My thoughts are not engaged to Homer only. I cannot be so much a poet as not to feel greatly for the King, the Queen, and the country. My speculations on these subjects are indeed melancholy, for no such tragedy has befallen in my day.¹ We are forbidden to trust in man; I will not therefore say I trust in Mr. Pitt;—but in his counsels, under the blessing of Providence, the remedy is, I believe to be found, if a remedy there be. His integrity, firmness, and sagacity, are the only human means that seem adequate to the great emergence. . . .

I am, my dear Sir,

Your most obliged and affectionate,

W. C.

¹ A reference to the king's first attack of insanity in October 1788.

5. THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

(LETTERS CCCXXVI.—CCCXXX.)

CCCXXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Jan 3, 1784.

. . . Know then that I have learnt long since, of Abbé Raynal,¹ to hate all monopolies, as injurious, howsoever managed, to the interests of commerce at large: consequently the charter in question would not at any rate be a favourite of mine. This however is of itself I confess no sufficient reason to justify the resumption of it. But such reasons I think are not wanting. A grant of that kind, it is well known, is always fortified by the non-performance of the conditions. And why not equally forfeited, if those conditions are exceeded, if the design of it be perverted, and its operation extended to objects which were never in the contemplation of the donor? This appears to me to be no misrepresentation of their case, whose charter is supposed to be in danger.² It constitutes them a trading company, and gives them an exclusive right to traffic in the East Indies. But it does no more. It invests them with no sovereignty; it does not convey to them the royal prerogative of making war and peace, which the King cannot alienate if he would. But this prerogative they have exercised, and, forgetting the terms of their institution, have possessed themselves of an immense territory, which they have ruled with a rod of iron, to which it is impossible they should ever have a right, unless such a one as it is a disgrace to plead,—the right of conquest. The potentates of this country they dash in pieces like a potter's vessel, as often as they please, making the happiness of thirty millions of mankind a consideration subordinate to that of their own emolument, oppressing them as often as it may serve a lucrative purpose, and in no instance, that I have ever heard, consulting their interest or advantage. That government therefore is bound to interfere, and to unking these tyrants, is to me self-evident. And if having subjugated so much of this miserable world, it is therefore necessary that we must keep possession of it, it appears to me a duty so binding upon the legislature to rescue it from the hands of those usurpers, that I should think a curse, and

¹ Writer of a philosophical history of the Europeans in India.² Because of Pitt's India Bill, 1784.

a bitter one, must follow the neglect of it. But suppose this were done, can they be legally deprived of their charter? In truth I think so. If the abuse and perversion of a charter can amount to a defeasance of it, never were they so grossly palpable as in this instance; never was charter so justly forfeited. Neither am I at all afraid that such a measure should be drawn into a precedent, unless it could be alleged as a sufficient reason for not hanging a rogue, that perhaps magistracy might grow wanton in the exercise of such a power, and now and then hang up an honest man for its amusement. When the governors of the bank shall have deserved the same severity, I hope they will meet with it.¹ In the mean time I do not think them a whit more in jeopardy because a corporation of plunderers have been brought to justice.

We are well, and love you all. I never wrote in such a hurry, nor in such disturbance. Pardon the effects, and believe me yours affectionately,

W. C.

CCCXXVII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Jan. 25, 1784

This contention about East Indian patronage seems not unlikely to avenge upon us, by its consequences, the mischiefs we have done there. The matter in dispute is too precious to be relinquished by either party; and each is jealous of the influence the other would derive from the possession of it. In a country whose politics have so long rolled upon the wheels of corruption, an affair of such value, must prove a weight in either scale absolutely destructive of the very idea of a balance. Every man has his sentiments upon this subject, and I have mine. Were I constituted umpire of this strife, with full powers to decide it, I would tie a talent of lead about the neck of this patronage, and plunge it into the depths of the sea. To speak less figuratively, I would abandon all territorial interest in a country to which we can have no right,² and which we cannot

¹ Thieves at home must hang; but he that puts
Into his overgorged and bloated purse
The wealth of Indian provinces escapes

The Task, I. 736-8.

² Is India free? and does she wear her plumed
And jewelled turban with a smile of peace,
Or do we grind her still?

The Task, IV. 28-30

govern with any security to the happiness of the inhabitants, or without the danger of incurring either perpetual broils, or the most insupportable tyranny at home:—that sort of tyranny, I mean, which flatters and tantalises the subject with a show of freedom, and in reality allows him nothing more; bribing to the right and left, rich enough to afford the purchase of a thousand consciences, and consequently strong enough, if it happen to meet with an incorruptible one, to render all the efforts of that man, or of twenty such men, if they could be found, romantic, and of no effect. I am the King's most loyal subject, and most obedient humble servant. But by his majesty's leave, I must acknowledge I am not altogether convinced of the rectitude even of his own measures, or the simplicity of his views; and if I were satisfied that he himself is to be trusted, it is nevertheless palpable, that he cannot answer for his successors. At the same time he is my king, and I reverence him as such. I account his prerogative sacred, and shall never wish prosperity to a party that invades it, and that under the pretence of patriotism would annihilate all the consequence of a character essential to the very being of the constitution. For these reasons I am sorry that we have any dominion in the East,—that we have any such emoluments to contend about. Their immense value will probably prolong the dispute, and such struggles having been already made in the conduct of it, as have shaken our very foundations, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that still greater efforts and more fatal, are behind; and after all, the decision in favour of either side may be ruinous to the whole. In the mean time, that the Company themselves are but indifferently qualified for the kingship, is most deplorably evident. What shall I say therefore? I distrust the court, I suspect the patriots, I put the Company entirely aside, as having forfeited all claim to confidence in such a business, and see no remedy of course, but in the annihilation, if that could be accomplished, of the very existence of our authority in the East Indies. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,
most truly,

W. C.

CCCXXVIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Olney, March 11, 1784.

It is hardly possible for a man to interest himself less than I do in what passes in the political world. I have my own reasons for discharging myself of that burthen, and such

reasons as I believe no man ever had but myself. Had I dropped from the moon into this system eleven years ago, the concerns of a world to which I did not naturally belong, would not have engaged me much; and just as little engaged I feel myself under a persuasion which nothing has yet shaken, that I am an extramundane character with reference to this globe of yours; and that, though not a native of the moon, I was not, however, made of the dust of this planet. Yet I confess that for the sake of amusement, and that I may forget as much as possible my terrible translation out of an England that gave me birth into an England that did not, I sometimes talk upon these subjects, and to you have sometimes written upon them, as if they were indeed as important to me as they are to every man around me. Nor have I any objection to doing so at this moment. Know, then, that my reasons for thinking (in which thoughts I appear to you to be singular) that the present contest is between the Crown and the Commons are these: the Crown, no less than the India Company, quarrelled with Fox's India Bill¹: the Crown, for causes palpable enough, espoused the cause of Mr. Pitt's. The Crown interfered by a whispered message to nullify the former, and by upholding the new minister in his place, in opposition to a majority of the House, in hopes to give effect to the latter; but finding itself unable to carry this favourite point in a Parliament so unfriendly to its designs, the Crown dissolved it: expecting, and I fear with too good reason, that a new one will be more propitious. Thus in short hand I have accounted for my opinion; for as to what is said by many, of the King's personal dislike of Fox and Lord North, I put it pretty much out of the question; hoping, at least, that he is a more sensible king than to throw the whole business of his empire into a state of distraction, merely to gratify a pique against two individuals. The patronage of the East Indies will be a dangerous weapon in whatever hands; I had rather, however, see it lodged anywhere than with the Crown. In that event, I should say adieu for ever to every hope of an uncorrupt representation, and consequently to every hope of constitutional liberty for the subject. In one point, after all, we are agreed, we think favourably of neither party; and for my own particular, I can truly say, that I have no prospect of deliverance for this country, but the same that I have of a possibility that we may one day be disencumbered of our ruinous possessions in the East. . . .

¹ Passed by the House of Commons, but rejected by the House of Lords, in 1783, through undue interference by the king.

I have just room to add, that we love you as usual, and are your very affectionate William and Mary.

W. C.

CCCXXIX.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 16, 1788.

. . . I recommend it to you, my dear, by all means to embrace the fair occasion, and to put yourself in the way of being squeezed and incommoded a few hours, for the sake of hearing and seeing what you will never have an opportunity to see and hear hereafter,—the trial of a man who has been greater and more feared than the great Mogul himself. Whatever we are at home, we certainly have been tyrants in the East; and if these men have, as they are charged, rioted in the miseries of the innocent, and dealt death to the guiltless with an unsparing hand, may they receive a retribution that shall in future make all governors and judges of ours, in those distant regions, tremble! While I speak thus, I equally wish them acquitted. They were both my schoolfellows, and for Hastings I had a particular value. Farewell.

W. C.

CCCXXX.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 22, 1788

I do not wonder that your ears and feelings were hurt by Mr. Burke's severe invective. But you are to know, my dear, or probably you know it already, that the prosecution of public delinquents has always, and in all countries, been thus conducted. The style of a criminal charge of this kind has been an affair settled among orators from the days of Tully to the present; and like all other practices that have obtained for ages, this in particular seems to have been founded originally in reason, and in the necessity of the case.

He who accuses another to the state, must not appear himself unmoved by the view of crimes with which he charges him, lest he should be suspected of fiction, or of precipitancy, or of a consciousness that after all he shall not be able to prove his allegations. On the contrary, in order to impress the minds of his hearers with a persuasion that he himself at least is convinced of the criminality of the prisoner, he must be vehement, energetic, rapid; must call him tyrant, and traitor, and every thing else that is odious, and all this to his face, because all

this, bad as it is, is no more than he undertakes to prove in the sequel. And if he cannot prove it he must himself appear in a light very little more desirable, and at the best to have trifled with the tribunal to which he has summoned him.

Thus Tully, in the very first sentence of his oration against Catiline, calls him a monster; a manner of address in which he persisted till said monster, unable to support the fury of his accuser's eloquence any longer, rose from his seat, elbowed for himself a passage through the crowd, and at last burst from the senate house in an agony, as if the Furies themselves had followed him.

And now, my dear, though I have thus spoken, and have seemed to plead the cause of that species of eloquence which you, and every creature who has your sentiments, must necessarily dislike, perhaps I am not altogether convinced of its propriety. Perhaps, at the bottom, I am much more of opinion that if the charge, unaccompanied by any inflammatory matter and simply detailed, being once delivered into the court and read aloud, the witnesses were immediately examined, and sentence pronounced according to the evidence; not only the process would be shortened, much time and much expense saved, but justice would have at least as fair play as now she has. Prejudice is of no use in weighing the question guilty or not guilty? and the principal aim, end, and effect of such introductory harangues is to create as much prejudice as possible. When you and I therefore shall have the sole management of such a business entrusted to us, we will order it otherwise.

I was glad to learn from the papers that our cousin Henry shone as he did in reading the charge. This must have given much pleasure to the General.

Thy ever affectionate

W. C.

6. THE KING'S ILLNESS

(LETTERS CCCXXXI.—CCCXXXII.)

In 1788 George III became insane, and as no arrangements had been made for the conduct of government there was considerable debate between Pitt and Fox, the personal friend of the Prince of Wales, on the question of the regency. Before any definite settlement had been made the king recovered. It is interesting, therefore, to read, in this connection, Cowper's animadversions upon the prince's dissolute behaviour.

CCCXXXI.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Wednesday, Feb 25, 1789.

You dislike the crossing of letters, and so do I; yet though I write at the hazard of that inconvenience, I feel that I must write this evening. My hands are at present less full than usual. Having lately sent Johnson as much *Review* work as will serve to satisfy him for a time, I allow myself a little vacation from those labours, which, however, I must soon resume.

The King's recovery is with us a subject of daily conversation and of continual joy. It is so providentially timed that no man who believes a Providence at all can say less of it than that *This is the finger of God!* Never was a hungry faction so mortally disappointed, nor the integrity of an upright administration more openly rewarded. It is a wonderful era in the history of this country, and posterity will envy us the happiness of having lived at such a period. We who are loyal subjects and love our monarch, may now take up the old Jacobite ditty, and say *The king shall enjoy his own again*,—an application which I fear we should never have had an opportunity to make had his recovery been delayed but a little longer. The faction at home have driven too fast, and the Irish will find that they have made a blunder. Now let us listen to the raptures that will be pretended on this occasion. Sheridan, I expect, will soar in rhetorical ecstasies; Burke will say his prayers are answered; and Fox will term it the happiest event that he has ever witnessed; and while they thus speak, they will gnash their teeth, and curse inwardly. Oh! they are a blessed junto!—may opposition to ministry be their business while they live! . . .

I am, my dear, most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 18, 1792.

. . . You judge well concerning the Prince, and better than I did. His seducers are certainly most to be blamed, and so I have been used both to say and to think; but when I wrote my last, they happened not to occur to me. That he and all dissolute princes are entitled to compassion on account of the snares to which their situation exposes them, is likewise a remark which I have frequently made myself, but did not on that occasion advert to it. But the day is come when it behoves princes to be a little more cautious. These allowances will not be made by the many, especially they will be apt to censure their excesses with a good deal of severity, if themselves should be called upon to pay the piper. That our royal hopes are not a little more discreet in their management at such a time as this seems utterly unaccountable, unless on a supposition that their practices have brought them to a state of blind and frantic desperation that will not suffer them to regard the consequences. The ministers of sedition are busy,—indefatigable indeed, and the expense that attends a kingly government is an argument which millions begin to feel the force of. But I shall tire you with my politics, and the more perhaps because they are so gloomy. The sable cloud, however, has a luminous edge. The unmanageable prince and the no less unmanageable multitude, have each a mouth into which God can thrust a curb when He pleases, and kings shall reign and the people obey to the last moment of His appointment.

Adieu, my dear friend; with our united love to yourself and Miss Catlett,

I remain affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

7. THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(LETTERS CCCXXXIII.—CCCXL.)

CCCXXXIII.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Dec. 18, 1789.

The present appears to me a wonderful period in the history of mankind. That nations so long contentedly slaves should on a sudden become enamoured of liberty, and understand, as

suddenly, their own natural right to it, feeling themselves at the same time inspired with resolution to assert it, seems difficult to account for from natural causes. With respect to the final issue of all this, I can only say, that if, having discovered the value of liberty, they should next discover the value of peace, and lastly the value of the word of God, they will be happier than they ever were since the rebellion of the first pair, and as happy as it is possible they should be in the present life.

• Most sincerely yours,

W. C.

CCCXXXIV.

TO LADY HESKETH

July 7, 1790

. . . The French, who like all lively folks are extreme in every thing, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society: but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics; and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idols. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely: I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it.

CCCXXXV.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, July 11, 1791.

. . . You judge right in supposing that I pity the King and Queen of France. I can truly say, that, except the late melancholy circumstances of our own, (when our sovereign had lost his senses, and his wife was almost worried out of hers,) no royal distresses have ever moved me so much. And still I pity them, prisoners as they are now for life, and since their late unsuccessful

attempt,¹ likely to be treated more scurvily than ever. Heaven help them, for in their case, all other help seems vain. . . .

Most entirely thine,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY DEAR MR. BULL,

Weston, July 27, 1791.

. . . I have blest myself on your account that you are at Brighton and not at Birmingham, where it seems they are so loyal and so pious that they show no mercy to dissenters.² How can you continue in a persuasion so offensive to the wise and good! Do you not yet perceive that the Bishops themselves hate you not more than the very blacksmith of the establishment, and will you not endeavour to get the better of your aversion to red-nosed singing men and organs? Come—be received into the bosom of mother-church, so shall you never want a jig for your amusement on Sundays, and shall save perhaps your academy from a conflagration. . . .

Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXVII.

TO MRS. COURTENAY

MY DEAREST CATHARINA,

Eartham, Sept 10, 1792.

. . . You could hardly have sent me intelligence that would have gratified me more than that of my two dear friends, Sir John and Lady Throckmorton, having departed from Paris two days before the terrible 10th of August.³ I have had many anxious thoughts on their account; and am truly happy to learn that they have sought a more peaceful region, while it was yet permitted them to do so. They will not, I trust, revisit those scenes of tumult and horror while they shall continue to merit that description. We are here all of one mind respecting the cause in which the Parisians are engaged; wish them a free people, and as happy as they can wish themselves. But their conduct has not always pleased us: We are shocked at their sanguinary proceedings, and begin to fear, myself in particular, that they will prove themselves unworthy, because incapable of enjoying it, of the inestimable blessings of liberty. My daily

¹ The attempt of Louis XVI to escape from Paris.

² Refers to the attack by the mob on the house of Dr Joseph Priestley, the scientist and Nonconformist, because of his sympathy with the French Revolution.

³ When the mob stormed the Tuileries and killed the king's guards.

toast is, Sobriety and Freedom to the French; for they seem as destitute of the former as they are eager to secure the latter. . . .

My dear Catharina,

Most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXVIII.

TO LADY HESKETH

Dec. 1, 1792.

. . . The French are a vain and childish people, and conduct themselves on this grand occasion with a levity and extravagance nearly akin to madness; but it would have been better for Austria and Prussia to let them alone.¹ All nations have a right to choose their own mode of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself; for whenever the people choose to be masters they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have a reform, we certainly shall. Depend upon it, my dear, the hour is come when power founded in patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer. Concessions too must be made to dissenters of every denomination. They have a right to them, a right to all the privileges of Englishmen, and sooner or later, by fair means or by force, they will have them.

Adieu, my dearest coz, I have only time to add Mrs. U.'s most affectionate remembrances, and to conclude myself,

• Ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXIX.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, March 4, 1793.

Since I received your last I have been much indisposed, very blind, and very busy. But I have not suffered all these evils at one and the same time. While the winter lasted I was miserable with a fever on my spirits; when the spring began to approach I was seized with an inflammation in my eyes; and ever since I have been able to use them, have been employed in giving more last touches to Homer, who is on the point of going to the press again.

Though you are Tory I believe, and I am Whig, our sentiments concerning the madcaps of France are much the same. They are a terrible race, and I have a horror both of them and

¹ War had already been declared between France and these two countries.

their principles. Tacitus is certainly living now, and the quotations you sent me can be nothing but extracts from some letter of his to yourself.

Yours sincerely,

W. C.

CCCXI.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Weston, Nov. 10, 1793.

. . . I am entirely of your mind respecting this conflagration by which all Europe suffers at present, and is likely to suffer for a long time to come. The same mistake seems to have prevailed as in the American business. We then flattered ourselves that the colonies would prove an easy conquest; and when all the neighbour nations armed themselves against France, we imagined, I believe, that she too would be presently vanquished. But we begin already to be undeceived, and God only knows to what a degree we may find we have erred at the conclusion. Such however is the state of things all around us, as reminds me continually of the Psalmist's expression—"*He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*"—And I rather wish than hope in some of my melancholy moods that England herself may escape a fracture.

I remain truly yours,

W. C.

8. PROSPECTIVE REFORMS

(LETTER CCCXLI.)

CCCXLI.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

Weston, Dec 16, 1792.

We differ so little, that it is pity we should not agree. The possibility of restoring our diseased government is, I think, the only point on which we are not of one mind. If you are right, and it cannot be touched in the medical way, without danger of absolute ruin to the constitution, keep the doctors at a distance, say I—and let us live as long as we can. But perhaps physicians might be found of skill sufficient for the purpose, were they but as willing as able. Who are they? Not those honest blunderers the mob, but our governors themselves. As

it is in the power of any individual to be honest if he will, any body of men are, as it seems to me, equally possessed of the same option. For I can never persuade myself to think the world so constituted by the Author of it, and human society, which is His ordinance, so shabby a business, that the buying and selling of votes and consciences should be essential to its existence. As to multiplied representation, I know not that I foresee any great advantage likely to arise from that.¹ Provided there be but a reasonable number of reasonable heads laid together for the good of the nation, the end may as well be answered by five hundred, as it would be by a thousand, and perhaps better. But then they should be honest as well as wise; and in order that they may be so, they should put it out of their own power to be otherwise. This they might certainly do, if they would; and would they do it, I am not convinced that any great mischief would ensue. You say, "somebody must have influence," but I see no necessity for it. Let integrity of intention and a due share of ability be supposed, and the influence will be in the right place, it will all centre in the zeal and good of the nation. That will influence their debates and decisions, and nothing else ought to do it. You will say perhaps that, wise men and honest men as they are supposed, they are yet liable to be split into almost as many differences of opinion as there are individuals: but I rather think not. It is observed of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough, that each always approved and seconded the plans and views of the other; and the reason given for it is, that they were men of equal ability. The same cause that could make two unanimous, would make twenty so; and would at least secure a majority among as many hundreds. As to the reformation of the church, I want none, unless by a better provision for the inferior clergy: and if that could be brought about by emaciating a little some of our too corpulent dignitaries, I should be well contented.

The dissenters, I think, Catholics, and others, have all a right to the privileges of all other Englishmen, because to deprive them is persecution; and persecution on any account, but especially on a religious one, is an abomination. But after all, *valeat respublica*, I love my country, I love my king, and I wish peace and prosperity to old England.

Adieu, ●

W. C.

¹ Unsuccessful attempts at parliamentary reform had been made in 1785 and 1790.

XV. SOCIAL HISTORY ILLUSTRATED

Cowper's letters shed much light on the social history of the eighteenth century. To begin with the Church, we find that he comments severely in his poetry and in his letters on the failure of the Anglican clergy as moral and spiritual guides. Associated as he was with Newton, the friend and follower of Whitefield, he voices the opinions of the new religious sect, and so we find him writing: "Many of the most profligate characters are the very men to whom the morals and even the souls of others are entrusted," and again: "The generality of the clergy, especially within these last twenty or thirty years, have worn their circingles so loose, that I verily believe no measure that proposed an accession of privilege to an order which the laity retain but little respect for, would meet with the countenance of the legislature." As we have already seen, ignorance, brutality and profanity were common among the poor, and attempts (in Olney) to improve the moral welfare of the young by means of Sunday schools had not been very successful. Cowper deplors the irreligion and dissipation of the aristocracy—the violation of the Sabbath by the Duke of Gloucester, and the immoral conduct of his brother, the Prince of Wales.

But changes were in the air; Howard was alleviating the lot of the prisoners; Wilberforce was championing the cause of the slaves; various philanthropic societies were endeavouring to ameliorate the physical and moral condition of the poor and the outcast; whilst the moral tone of the upper classes was distinctly improving.

The laws were still severe—men were hanged for theft, but this did not act as a deterrent; elections were frequently the occasion of riotous scenes such as Cowper describes below¹; the poor law system was badly administered by negligent, autocratic and corrupt overseers:

"Knaves in office, partial in the work
Of distribution."

The Task, IV. 412-3.

The postal system was still very primitive: letters were conveyed by post-boys on horseback until the year 1784, when the mail-coach was introduced. The nearest post-town for Cowper was five miles away at Newport Pagnell, and letters were delivered at Olney three times a week before 1787, and daily afterwards. Cowper frequently complains of the delay in delivering letters; on one occasion, at least, the boy lost the post-bag with its contents. As the poet was a frequent correspondent, he generally availed himself of the much-abused privilege of franking, whereby letters signed by members of Parliament could be sent post free.

Some of Cowper's letters illustrate the growing popularity of the seaside resort: he had himself visited Margate, Ramsgate and Brighton, the last of which he describes as a "scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, yawning, sleeping."

We are reminded that the century was one of progress. Brindley completed his first canal in 1761, and Cowper refers, with no great approval, to the one in the course of construction through Bedfordshire. He took a keen interest in balloon experiments: "Thanks to Montgolfier, we shall

¹ See Letter No. CCCXLVI.

fly at last," he wrote, five months after that inventor made his first successful attempt, and we remember that the poet's first meeting with the Throcknortons was on the occasion of a balloon ascent, one of the many that he witnessed at Weston.

Lastly, something remains to be said about those letters dealing with his purchases and presents. We gather the impression that he was fastidious in his tastes, not objecting to paying half a guinea for a "genteelish toothpick-case," favouring green satin for an under-waistcoat, and offering twenty-five shillings for a second-hand stock-buckle to fasten his collar. Both Mrs. Unwin and Cowper were partial to fish, which was procured for them in London by their friends; on one occasion, "two pair of remarkably fine soles with shrimps" reached Olney "in sixteen hours after they set out from London," a distance of nearly sixty miles. Not the least interesting reference is to the German cuckoo-clock that he wished to be bought in Holborn: "They are well-going clocks, and cheap . . . and such numbers of them are annually imported, that they are become even a considerable article of commerce."

1. RELIGION

(LETTERS CCCXLII.—CCCXLV.)

CCCXLII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 6, 1780.

I never was, any more than yourself, a friend to pluralities; they are generally found in the hands of the avaricious, whose insatiable hunger after preferment proves them unworthy of any at all. They attend much to the regular payment of their dues, but not at all to the spiritual interests of their parishioners. Having forgot their duty, or never known it, they differ in nothing from the laity, except their outward garb, and their exclusive right to the desk and pulpit. But when pluralities seek the man, instead of being sought by him; and when the man is honest, conscientious, and pious; careful to employ a substitute in those respects like himself; and, not contented with this, will see with his own eyes that the concerns of his parishes are decently and diligently administered; in that case, considering the present dearth of such characters in the ministry, I think it an event advantageous to the people, and much to be desired by all who regret the great and apparent want of sobriety and earnestness among the clergy. A man who does not seek a living merely as a pecuniary emolument, has no need, in my judgement, to refuse one because it is so. He means to do his duty, and by doing it he earns his wages. The two Ramsdens being contiguous to each other, and falling easily under the care of one pastor, and both so near to Stock that you can visit them without difficulty, as often as you please, I see no reason-

able objection, nor does your mother. As to the wry-mouthed sneers and illiberal misconstructions of the censorious, I know no better shield to guard you against them, than what you are already furnished with—a clear and unoffended conscience.

The salmon came safe and punctual to its assignation; it served us for two dinners and six suppers, was remarkably fresh and fine. Item, the lobster. . . .

W. C.

CCCXLIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 23, 1781

. . . I am delighted with your project, but not with the view I have of its success. If the world would form its opinion of the clerical character at large, from yours in particular, I have no doubt but the event would be as prosperous as you could wish. But I suppose there is not a member of either house who does not see within the circle of his own acquaintance, a minister, perhaps many ministers, whose integrity would contribute but little to the effect of such a bill. Here are seven or eight in the neighbourhood of Olney, who have shaken hands with sobriety, and who would rather suppress the church, were it not for the emoluments annexed, than discourage the sale of strong beer in a single instance. Were I myself in Parliament, I am not sure that I could favour your scheme; are there not to be found within five miles of almost every neighbourhood, parsons who would purchase well accustomed public-houses, because they could secure them a licence, and patronise them when they had done? I think no penalty would prevent the abuse, on account of the difficulty of proof, and that no ingenuity could guard against all the possible abuses. To sum up all in few words, the generality of the clergy, especially within these last twenty or thirty years, have worn their circingles so loose, that I verily believe no measure that proposed an accession of privilege to an order which the laity retain but little respect for, would meet with the countenance of the legislature. You will do me the justice to suppose that I do not say these things to gratify a splenetic humour or a censorious turn of mind; far from it,—it may add, perhaps, to the severity of the foregoing observations to assert, but if it does, I cannot help asserting, that I verily believe them to be founded upon fact, and that I am sure, partly from my own knowledge, and partly from the report of those whose veracity I can depend upon, that in this part of the world at least,

many of the most profligate characters are the very men to whom the morals, and even the souls of others are entrusted; and I cannot suppose that the diocese of Lincoln, or this part of it in particular, is more unfortunate in that respect than the rest of the kingdom. . . .

I am glad I did not expect to hear from you by this post, for the boy has lost the bag in which your letter must have been enclosed;—another reason for my prolixity!

• Yours affectionately,

W. C.

CCCXLIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 7, 1782.

. . . What a medley are our public prints, half the page filled with the ruin of the country, and the other half filled with the vices and pleasures of it;—here an island taken, and there a new comedy;—here an empire lost, and there an Italian opera, or the Duke of Gloucester's rout on a Sunday!

"May it please your R. H.! I am an Englishman, and must stand or fall with the nation. Religion, its true Palladium, has been stolen away; and it is crumbling into dust. Sin ruins us, the sins of the great especially, and of their sins especially the violation of the sabbath, because it is naturally productive of all the rest. Is it fit that a Prince should make the sabbath a day of dissipation, and that not content with his own personal profanation of it, he should invite all whose rank entitles them to the honour of such distinction, to partake with him in his guilt? Are examples operative, in proportion to the dignity of those who set them? Whose then more pernicious than your own in this flagrant instance of impiety? For shame, Sir!—if you wish well to your brother's arms, and would be glad to see the kingdom emerging again from her ruins, pay more respect to an ordinance that deserves the deepest! I do not say pardon this short remonstrance!—The concern I feel for my country, and the interest I have in its prosperity, give me a right to make it. I am, &c."

Thus one might write to his Highness, and (I suppose) might be as profitably employed in whistling the tune of an old ballad. Lord P—— had a rout too on the same day.—Is he the son of that P——, who bought Punch for a hundred pounds, and having kept him a week, tore him limb from limb because he was sullen and would not speak?—Probably he is.

I have no copy of the Preface, nor do I know at present how Johnson and Mr. Newton have settled it. In the matter of it there was nothing offensively peculiar. But it was thought too pious.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCCXLV.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 31, 1783.

. . . Our illustrious visitors from the continent, whatever opinion they may conceive of our *politesse*, in which perhaps they may condescend to think us inferior only to themselves, are likely to entertain but a mean one of our devotion. They will observe, at least, that the sabbath is almost as obsolete in England as in France.¹ I feel something like indignation kindle within me, when the papers tell me that our dukes and our judges, the legislators who not long since enacted a penalty upon the profanation of that day, themselves profane it, and in a manner the most notorious. The Duchess of Devonshire has amused the world and herself almost as long as the most celebrated lady can expect to do it. They that were infants when she first started in the race of pleasure, are now beginning to engage attention, and will soon elbow that Queen of the revels out of her delightful office. Instead of a girdle there will be a rent, and instead of beauty, baldness. I once knew her Grace of Devonshire's mother well: she is a sensible and discreet woman, so that the daughter has the more to fear, and the less to plead in her excuse. Yet a little while, and she and all such will know that their life was madness.—*Quicquid in buccam venerit, loquor.*

We are well, and shall rejoice to see you at any time. Be assured of our love, and believe me, my dear friend,

Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

¹ O Italy!—Thy sabbaths will be soon

Our sabbaths, closed with mummery and buffoon.

Progress of Error, 152-3

2. AN ELECTION

(LETTER CCCXLVI.)

CCCXLVI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 26, 1784.

. . . The candidates for this county have set an example of economy which other candidates would do well to follow, having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform however which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity to hear what gentlemen could say who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault, like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a merry andrew's jacket, stepped forward, and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field,* who made him repent of his presumption. Mr. Ashburner¹ was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him,—he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it: and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in gaol.

Adieu, my dear friend; writing makes my back ache, and my paper is full.

We love you, and are yours,

W.^d AND M.

(See also Letter No. CCXCIII.)

¹ The draper (see Letter No. CC.).

3.¹ THE POOR LAW

(LETTER CCCXLVII.)

CCCXLVII.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan 1. 1788.

. . . The small pox has done, I believe, all that it has to do at Weston. Old folks, and even women with child, have been inoculated. We talk of our freedom, and some of us are free enough, but not the poor. Dependent as they are upon parish bounty, they are sometimes obliged to submit to impositions, which perhaps in France itself could hardly be paralleled. Can man or woman be said to be free, who is commanded to take a distemper, sometimes at least mortal, and in circumstances most likely to make it so? No circumstance whatever was permitted to exempt the inhabitants of Weston. The old as well as the young have been inoculated. Were I asked who is the most arbitrary sovereign on earth? I should answer, neither the King of France, nor the Grand Signior, but an Overseer of the poor in England.

I am as heretofore occupied with Homer: my present occupation is the revision of all I have done, viz, of the first fifteen books. I stand amazed at my own increasing dexterity in the business, being verily persuaded that, as far as I have gone, I have improved the work to double its former value.

That you may begin the new year and end it in all health and happiness, and many more when the present shall have been long an old one, is the ardent wish of Mrs. Unwin, and of yours, my dearest coz, most cordially,

W. C.

4. POSTAL ARRANGEMENTS

(LETTER CCCXLVIII.)

CCCXLVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 5, 1781.

If the old adage be true, that "he gives twice, who gives speedily," it is equally true, that he who not only uses expedition in giving, but gives more than was asked, gives thrice at least. Such is the style in which Mr. Smith confers a favour. He has not only sent me franks to Johnson, but, under another

cover, has added six to you. These last, for aught that appears by your letter, he threw in of his own mere bounty. I beg that my share of thanks may not be wanting on this occasion, and that when you write to him next you will assure him of the sense I have of the obligation, which is the more flattering, as it includes a proof of his predilection in favour of the poems his franks are destined to enclose. May they not forfeit his good opinion hereafter, nor yours, to whom I hold myself indebted in the first place, and who have equally given me credit for their deservings! Your mother says, that although there are passages in them containing opinions which will not be universally subscribed to, the world will at least allow—what my great modesty will not permit me to subjoin. I have the highest opinion of her judgement, and know, by having experienced the soundness of them, that her observations are always worthy of attention and regard. Yet, strange as it may seem, I do not feel the vanity of an author, when she commends me;—but I feel something better, a spur to my diligence, and a cordial to my spirits, both together animating me to deserve, at least not to fall short of her expectations. . . .

W. C.

5. CANALS.

(LETTER CCCXLIX.)

CCCXLIX.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 29, 1793.

. . . As to the canal that is to be my neighbour, I hear little about it. The Courtenays of Weston have nothing to do with it, and I have no intercourse with Tyringham. When it is finished, the people of these parts will have to carry their coals seven miles only, which now they bring from Northampton or Bedford, both at the distance of fifteen. But, as Balaam says, who shall live when these things are done? It is not for me, a sexagenarian already, to expect that I shall. The chief objection to canals in general seems to be, that, multiplying as they do, they are likely to swallow the coasting trade.

I cannot tell you the joy I feel at the disappointment of the French; pitiful mimics of Spartan and Roman virtue, without a grain of it in their whole character.

Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

†

6. BALLOONS

(LETTERS CCCL.—CCCLII.)

CCCL.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Sept. 29, 1783.

We are sorry that you and your household partake so largely of the ill effects of this unhealthy season. You are happy, however, in having hitherto escaped the epidemic fever, which has prevailed much in this part of the kingdom, and carried many off. Your mother and I are well. After more than a fortnight's indisposition, which slight appellation is quite adequate to the description of all I suffered, I am at length restored by a grain or two of emetic tartar. It is a tax I generally pay in autumn. By this time, I hope, a purer ether than we have seen for months, and these brighter suns than the summer had to boast, have cheered your spirits, and made your existence more comfortable. We are rational; but we are animal too, and therefore subject to the influences of the weather. The cattle in the fields show evident symptoms of lassitude and disgust in an unpleasant season; and we, their lords and masters, are constrained to sympathise with them; the only difference between us is, that they know not the cause of their dejection, and we do,—but, for our humiliation, are equally at a loss to cure it. Upon this account I have sometimes wished myself a philosopher. How happy, in comparison with myself, does the sagacious investigator of nature seem, whose fancy is ever employed in the invention of *hypotheses*, and his reason in the support of them! While he is accounting for the origin of the winds, he has no leisure to attend to their influence upon himself; and while he considers what the sun is made of, forgets that he has not shone for a month. One project indeed supplants another. The *vortices* of Descartes gave way to the gravitation of Newton, and this again is threatened by the electrical fluid of a modern. One generation blows bubbles, and the next breaks them. But in the mean time your philosopher is a happy man. He escapes a thousand inquietudes to which the indolent are subject, and finds his occupation, whether it be the pursuit of a butterfly, or a demonstration, the wholesomest exercise in the world. As he proceeds, he applauds himself. His discoveries, though eventually perhaps they prove but dreams, are to him realities.

The world gaze at him as he does at new phenomena in the heavens, and perhaps understand him as little. But this does not prevent their praises, nor at all disturb him in the enjoyment of that self-complacence, to which his imaginary success entitles him. He wears his honours while he lives, and if another strips them off when he has been dead a century, it is no great matter; he can then make shift without them.

I have said a great deal upon this subject, and know not what it all amounts to. I did not intend a syllable of it when I began. But *currente calamo*, I stumbled upon it. My end is to amuse myself and you. The former of these two points is secured. I shall be happy if I do not miss the latter.

By the way, what is your opinion of these air-balloons? I am quite charmed with the discovery. Is it not possible (do you suppose) to convey such a quantity of inflammable air into the stomach and abdomen, that the philosopher, no longer gravitating to a centre, shall ascend by his own comparative levity, and never stop till he has reached the medium exactly *in equilibrio* with himself? May he not by the help of a paste-board rudder, attached to his posteriors, steer himself in that purer element with ease; and again by a slow and gradual discharge of his aerial contents, recover his former tendency to the earth, and descend without the smallest danger or inconvenience? These things are worth inquiry; and (I dare say) they will be inquired after as they deserve. The *pennæ non homini datæ* are likely to be less regretted than they were; and perhaps a flight of academicians and a covey of fine ladies may be no uncommon spectacle in the next generation. A letter which appeared in the public prints last week convinces me, that the learned are not without hopes of some such improvement upon this discovery. The author is a sensible and ingenious man, and under a reasonable apprehension that the ignorant may feel themselves inclined to laugh upon a subject that affects himself with the utmost seriousness, with much good manners and management bespeaks their patience, suggesting many good consequences that may result from a course of experiments upon this machine, and amongst others, that it may be of use in ascertaining the shape of continents and islands, and the face of wide-extended and far distant countries; an end not to be hoped for, unless by these means of extraordinary elevation the human prospect may be immensely enlarged, and the philosopher, exalted to the skies, attain a view of the whole hemisphere at once. But whether he is to ascend by the mere

inflation of his person, as hinted above, or whether in a sort of bandbox, supported upon balloons, is not yet apparent, nor (I suppose) even in his own idea perfectly decided.

Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

CCCLI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 17, 1783.

. . . Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that let the crowd be as great as it will below, there is always room enough overhead. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be overhead, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt, a night or two since, that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair, with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and, with one flourish of my whip, descended; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger, either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit, and bishops their visitations; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say, that they have made it. . . .

Yours, my dear Friend,

WM. COWPER.

CCCLII.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 15, 1783.

I know not how it fares with you, at a time when philosophy has just brought forth her most extraordinary production, not excepting, perhaps, that prodigy, a ship, in all respects complete, and equal to the task of circumnavigating the globe. My mind, however, is frequently getting into these balloons, and is busy in multiplying speculations as airy as the regions through which they pass. The last account from France, which

seems so well authenticated, has changed my jocularly upon this occasion into serious expectation. The invention of these new vehicles is yet in its infancy, yet already they seem to have attained a degree of perfection which navigation did not reach, till ages of experience had matured it, and science had exhausted both her industry and her skill, in its improvement. I am aware, indeed, that the first boat or canoe that was ever formed, though rude in its construction—perhaps not constructed at all, being only a hollow tree that had fallen casually in the water, and which, though furnished with neither sails nor oars, might yet be guided by a pole—was a more perfect creature in its kind than a balloon at present; the single circumstance of its manageable nature giving it a clear superiority both in respect of safety and convenience. But the atmosphere, though a much thinner medium, we well know, resists the impression made upon it by the tail of a bird, as effectually as the water that of a ship's rudder. Pope, when inculcating one of his few useful lessons, and directing mankind to the providence of God as the true source of all their wisdom, says beautifully—

Learn of the little Nautilus to sail,
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale.

It is easy to parody these lines, so as to give them an accommodation and suitableness to the present purpose.

Learn of the circle-making kite to fly,
Spread the fan-tail, and wheel about the sky.

It is certain, at least, that nothing within the reach of human ingenuity will be left unattempted to accomplish, and add all that is wanting to this last effort of philosophical contrivance. The approximating powers of the telescope, and the powers by which the thunderstorm is delivered of its contents peaceably and without mischief, were once, perhaps, in appearance more remote from discovery, and seemed less practicable, than we may now suppose it to give direction to that which is already buoyant; especially possessed as we are of such consummate mechanical skill, already masters of principles which we have nothing to do but to apply, of which we have already availed ourselves in the similar case of navigation, and having in every fowl of the air a pattern, which now at length it may be sufficient to imitate. Wings and a tail, indeed, were of little use, while the body, so much heavier than the space of air it occupied, was sure to sink by its own weight, and could never be held in

equipoise by any implements of the kind which human strength could manage. But now we float; at random, indeed, pretty much, and as the wind drives us; for want of nothing, however, but that steerage which invention, the conqueror of many equal, if not superior difficulties, may be expected to supply.—Should the point be carried, and man at last become as familiar with the air as he has long been with the ocean, will it in its consequences prove a mercy, or a judgement? I think, a judgement. First, because if a power to convey himself from place to place, like a bird, would have been good for him, his Maker would have formed him with such a capacity. But he has been a groveller upon the earth for six thousand years, and now at last, when the close of this present state of things approaches, begins to exalt himself above it. So much the worse for *him*. Like a truant schoolboy, he breaks his bounds, and will have reason to repent of his presumption.—Secondly, I think it will prove a judgement, because with the exercise of very little foresight, it is easy to prognosticate a thousand evils which the project must necessarily bring after it; amounting at last to the confusion of all order, the annihilation of all authority, with dangers both to property and person, and impunity to the offenders. Were I an absolute legislator, I would therefore make it death for a man to be convicted of flying, the moment he could be caught; and to bring him down from his latitudes by a bullet sent through his head or his carriage, should be no murder. Philosophers would call me a Vandal; the scholar would say that, had it not been for me, the fable of Dædalus would have been realised; and historians would load my memory with reproaches of phlegm, and stupidity, and oppression; but in the mean time the world would go on quietly, and if it enjoyed less liberty, would at least be more secure. . . .

Nous sommes les vôtres,

GUILLAUME ET MARIE.

7. DRESS AND FASHIONS

(LETTERS CCCLIII.—CCCLV.)

CCCLIII.

TO MRS. NEWTON

DEAR MADAM,

Aug. 1781.

. . . I thank you for your little abridgment of my family's history. Like every thing that relates to the present world, in which there seems to be nearly an equal mixture of the lamentable and ridiculous, it affords both occasion to laugh and to cry. In this single instance of my uncle, I can see cause for both. He trembles upon the verge of fourscore: a white hat with a yellow lining is no indication of wisdom suitable to so great an age; he can go but one step farther in the road of impropriety, and direct his executor to bury him in it. He is a very little man, and had he lined his hat with pink instead of yellow, might have been gathered by a natural mistake for a mushroom, and sent off in a basket.

While the world lasts, fashion will continue to lead it by the nose. And, after all, what can fashion do for its most obsequious followers? It can ring the changes upon the same things, and it can do no more. Whether our hats be white or black, our caps high or low,—whether we wear two watches or one, is of little consequence. There is indeed an appearance of variety; but the folly and vanity that dictates and adopts the change, are invariably the same. When the fashions of a particular period appear more reasonable than those of the preceding, it is not because the world is grown more reasonable than it was; but because, in a course of perpetual changes, some of them must sometimes happen to be for the better. Neither do I suppose the preposterous customs that prevail at present, a proof of its greater folly. In a few years, perhaps next year, the fine gentleman will shut up his umbrella, and give it to his sister, filling his hand with a crab-tree cudgel instead of it: and when he has done so, will he be wiser than now? By no means. The love of change will have betrayed him into a propriety, which, in reality, he has no taste for, all his merit on the occasion amounting to no more than this—that, being weary of one plaything, he has taken up another. . . . “

Yours, dear madam,

Most affectionately,

W. C.

CCCLIV.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Oct. 20, 1784.

. . . We have to trouble you yet once again in the marketing way. I want a yard of green satin, to front a winter under-waistcoat, and your mother a pound of prepared hartshorn. Being tolerably honest folks, it is probable that we shall some time or other pay you all our debts. These and the cream-pot may all come together by the waggon.

I can easily see that you may have very reasonable objections to my dedicatory proposal. You are a clergyman, and I have banged your order. You are a child of *Alma Mater*, and I have banged her too. Lay yourself therefore under no constraints that I do not lay you under, but consider yourself as perfectly free.

With our best love to you all, I bid you heartily farewell. I am tired of this endless scribblement. Adieu!

Yours,
W. C.

CCCLV.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

MY DEAREST MADAM,

The Lodge, March 21, 1790.

. . . My periwig is arrived, and is the very perfection of all periwigs, having only one fault; which is, that my head will only go into the first half of it, the other half, or the upper part of it, continuing still unoccupied. My artist in this way at Olney has however undertaken to make the whole of it tenantable, and then I shall be twenty years younger than you have ever seen me.

I heard of your birthday very early in the morning; the news came from the steeple.

W. C.

(See also Letter No. CCLXXVI.)

8. THE SEASIDE

(LETTERS CCCLVI.—CCCLVIII.)

CCCLVI.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July — 79

If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James Martin, glazier, and tell him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford, for half the money.

When I was at Margate, it was an excursion of pleasure to go to see Ramsgate. The pier, I remember, was accounted a most excellent piece of stonework, and such I found it. By this time, I suppose, it is finished; and surely it is no small advantage, that you have an opportunity of observing how nicely those great stones are put together, as often as you please, without either trouble or expense. But you think Margate more lively. So is a Cheshire cheese full of mites more lively than a sound one; but that very liveliness only proves its rottenness. I remember, too, that Margate, though full of company, was generally filled with such company, as people who were nice in the choice of their company, were rather fearful of keeping company with. The hoy went to London every week, loaded with mackerel and herrings, and returned loaded with company. The cheapness of the conveyance made it equally commodious for Dead fish and Lively company. So, perhaps, your solitude at Ramsgate may turn out another advantage; at least I should think it one.

There was not, at that time, much to be seen in the Isle of Thanet, besides the beauty of the country, and the fine prospects of the sea, which are no where surpassed except in the Isle of Wight, or upon some parts of the coast of Hampshire. One sight, however, I remember, engaged my curiosity, and I went to see it:—a fine piece of ruins, built by the late Lord Holland, at a great expense, which, the day after I saw it, tumbled down for nothing. Perhaps, therefore, it is still a ruin; and if it is, I would advise you by all means to visit it, as it must have been much improved by this fortunate incident. It is hardly possible to put stones together with that air of wild and magnificent disorder which they are sure to acquire by falling of their own accord.

We heartily wish that Mrs. Unwin may receive the utmost benefit of bathing. At the same time we caution *you* against

the use of it, however the heat of the weather may seem to recommend it. It is not safe for thin habits, hectically inclined.

I remember,—(the fourth and last thing I mean to remember upon this occasion), that Sam Cox, the counsel, walking by the seaside as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, "I was wondering that such an almost infinite and unwieldy element should produce a *sprat*."

Our love attends your whole party.

Yours affectionately,
W. C.

P.S.—You are desired to purchase three pounds of sixpenny white worsted, at a shop well recommended for that commodity. The Isle of Thanet is famous for it, beyond any other place in the kingdom.

CCCLVII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,

October 6, 1781.

What a world are you daily conversant with, which I have not seen these twenty years, and shall never see again! The arts of dissipation (I suppose) are no where practised with more refinement or success than at the place of your present residence. By your account of it, it seems to be just what it was when I visited it, a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping; the rooms perhaps more magnificent, because the proprietors are grown richer, but the manners and occupations of the company just the same. Though my life has long been like that of a recluse, I have not the temper of one, nor am I in the least an enemy to cheerfulness and good humour; but I cannot envy you your situation; I even feel myself constrained to prefer the silence of this nook, and the snug fireside in our own diminutive parlour, to all the splendour and gaiety of Brighton. . . .

Yours,
W. C.

CCCLVIII.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Nov. 5, 1781.

I give you joy of your safe return from the lips of the great deep. You did not indeed discern many signs of sobriety, or

true wisdom, among the people of Brighthelmstone, but it is not possible to observe the manners of a multitude, of whatever rank, without learning something; I mean, if a man has a mind like yours, capable of reflection. If he sees nothing to imitate, he is sure to see something to avoid; if nothing to congratulate his fellow creatures upon, at least much to excite his compassion. There is not, I think, so melancholy a sight in the world,—(an hospital is not to be compared with it,—) as that of a thousand persons distinguished by the name of gentry, who, gentle perhaps by nature, and made more gentle by education, have the appearance of being innocent and inoffensive, yet being destitute of all religion, or not at all governed by the religion they profess, are none of them at any great distance from an eternal state, where self-deception will be impossible, and where amusements cannot enter. Some of them, we may say, will be reclaimed;—it is most probable indeed that some of them will, because mercy, if one may be allowed the expression, is fond of distinguishing itself by seeking its objects among the most desperate cases; but the Scripture gives no encouragement to the warmest charity to hope for deliverance for them all. When I see an afflicted and an unhappy man, I say to myself, there is perhaps a man whom the world would envy, if they knew the value of his sorrows, which are possibly intended only to soften his heart, and to turn his affections toward their proper centre. But when I see or hear of a crowd of voluptuaries, who have no ears but for music, no eyes but for splendour, and no tongue but for impertinence and folly,—I say, or at least I see occasion to say—This is madness!—This persisted in must have a tragical conclusion.—It will condemn you, not only as Christians unworthy of the name, but as intelligent creatures.—You know by the light of nature, if you have not quenched it, that there is a God, and that a life like yours cannot be according to His will.

I ask no pardon of you for the gravity and gloominess of these reflections, which I stumbled on when I least expected it; though, to say the truth, these or others of a like complexion are sure to occur to me, when I think of a scene of public diversion like that you have lately left.

I remember Mr. — well; a man famous for nothing but idling away his time at the coffee-house, and bathing upon the open beach without the decent use of a machine. I may say upon the surest ground, that the world to which he conforms, despises him for doing so; because I remember well that I and

my party, who had not a grain of religion amongst us, always mentioned him with disdain; his charitable profanation of the sabbath will never earn him any other wages. . . .

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

9. PURCHASES AND PRESENTS

(LETTERS CCCLIX.-CCCLXIII.)

CCCLIX.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 21, 1781.

. . . Mrs. Unwin sends her love. We both wait for the day appointed with a pleasing sort of impatience, and comfort ourselves with the thought that though we cannot hasten its approach one moment, it will come, and must come, and that the interval, let what will happen, and how long soever it may seem, can be but a fortnight. We mean if you are able to keep your assignation.

She will be obliged to Mrs. Newton if she will be so good as to bring with her six tooth brushes, a quarter of a pound of oystershell powder, and two pounds of the same bohea as before. We shall hope to see you at dinner on Saturday, and as much sooner as you please; we always dine at two.

Yours, my dear Sir, and Mrs. Newton's,

Con ogni rispetto affettuoso,

WM. COWPER.

CCCLX.

TO MRS. NEWTON

Sept. 16, 1781

A noble theme demands a noble verse,
In such I thank you for your fine oysters.
The barrel was magnificently large,
But being sent to Olney at free charge,
Was not inserted in the driver's list,
And therefore overlook'd, forgot, or missed;
For when the messenger whom we dispatch'd
Inquired for oysters, Hob his noddle scratch'd,
Denying that his waggon or his wain
Did any such commodity contain.

In consequence of which, your welcome boon
 Did not arrive till yesterday at noon;
 In consequence of which some chanced to die,
 And some, though very sweet, were very dry.
 Now Madam says (and what she says must still
 Deserve attention, say she what she will),
 That what we call the Diligence, be-case
 It goes to London with a swifter pace,
 Would better suit the carriage of your gift,
 Returning downward with a pace as swift;
 And therefore recommends it with this aim—
 To save at least three days,—the price the same;
 For though it will not carry or convey
 For less than twelve pence, send whate'er you may,
 For oysters bred upon the salt sea shore,
 Packed in a barrel they will charge no more.

News have I none that I can deign to write,
 Save that it rain'd prodigiously last night;
 And that ourselves were, at the seventh hour,
 Caught in the first beginning of the shower;
 But walking, running, and with much ado,
 Got home—just time enough to be wet through.
 Yet both are well, and wondrous to be told,
 Soused as we were, we yet have caught no cold;
 And wishing just the same good hap to you,
 We say, good Madam, and good Sir, Adieu!

CCCLXI.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov 9, 1781

. . . Many thanks for two pair of remarkably fine soles, with shrimps; they were here in sixteen hours after they set out from London, and came very opportunely for me, who having a violent cold, could hardly have eaten any thing else.

Mrs. Unwin intended to have sent a couple of fowls, but being taken out of the coop, one of them appeared to be distempered, and two others, on examination, in the same predicament; one so bad that we were obliged to throw it away, and the other we gave away, not thinking it eatable except by those whose stomachs were less nice than our own. It is, I suppose, an epipoultrical malady.

You told me Mrs. Newton intended to have sent me a long

story about the fish. With both my two eyes, assisted by my two glasses, I could make neither more nor less of it than a long song, and so I read the passage to Mrs. Unwin once and again. I should have felt more than ordinary concern for the business that prevented her, and have endeavoured by all means to persuade her to resume her intention and to send me this song immediately, if Mrs. Unwin had not some time after discovered, with more sagacity than I happened to have in exercise, that, what I took for a song was only a story, the insignificant letter *t* being omitted, and the *ry* having assumed the appearance on this occasion of their near relations *ng*.

Mrs. Unwin would have attempted to write, but I dissuaded her from it, because even when she is pretty well she finds it hurtful.

You will believe us both, as ever,
Your obliged and affectionate friends and servants,
WM. AND M——.

CCCLXII.

TO MRS. NEWTON

MY DEAR MADAM,

March 14, 1782.

We return you many thanks, in the first place for a pot of scallops excellently pickled, and in the second for the snuff-box. We admired it, even when we supposed the price of it two guineas; guess then with what raptures we contemplated it when we found that it cost but one. It was genteel before, but then it became a perfect model of elegance, and worthy to be the desire of all noses.

Your own hams not being dry, Mrs. Unwin begs your acceptance of one of hers, together with a couple of fowls, and would have sent some broccoli, but has none—a reason for not sending it, which, however to be lamented, must yet be allowed a satisfactory one.

Dear Madam,
We are yours and Sir's most
Affectionately and truly
WM. C. AND M. U.

CCCLXIII.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The Lodge, June 5, 1789.

I am going to give you a deal of trouble, but London folks must be content to be troubled by country folks; for in London

only can our strange necessities be supplied. You must buy for me, if you please, a cuckoo clock; and now I will tell you where they are sold, which, Londoner as you are, it is possible you may not know. They are sold, I am informed, at more houses than one, in that narrow part of Holborn which leads into Broad St. Giles's. It seems they are well-going clocks, and cheap, which are the two best recommendations of any clock. They are made in Germany, and such numbers of them are annually imported, that they are become even a considerable article of commerce. . . .

W. C.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE LETTERS

THE number refers to the order of the letter in this selection. In a few cases it has been found more convenient to quote a part of the letter under one heading and a part under another.

1758.	To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.	August	xviii.
1762.	Do. do.	Sept. 2	xxii.
1763.	To Lady Hesketh	Aug. 9	xxiv.
1765.	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	June 24	xxv.
	Do. do.	July 3	xxvi.
	To Lady Hesketh	July 4	xxvii.
	Do. do.	July 5	xxviii.
	Do. do.	Sept. 14	xxix.
	Do. do.	Oct. 18	xxx.
	To Major Cowper	Oct. 18	xxxi.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Oct. 25	xxxii.
1766.	To Mrs. Cowper	Oct. 20	xxxiii.
1767.	Do. do.	March 14	ccxxxi.
	Do. do.	April 3	clxvi.
	Do. do.	July 13	xxxiv.
1768.	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	June 16	xxxv.
1770.	Do. do.	May 8	xxxvi.
	To Mrs. Cowper	June 7	xxxvii.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	April 20	cclxxxiii.
	Do. do.	May 25	cclxxxiv.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	July 18	ccxxvi.
	Do. do.	Dec. 3	ccxxxii.
1779.	Do. do.	May 26	ccxxxiii., cclxxi.
	Do. do.	July	ccclvi.
	Do. do.	Sept. 21	ccxxxiv.
	Do. do.	Oct. 31	clxxii.
	Do. do.	Dec. 2	clxvii.

1780.	To Mrs. Newton	March 4	xxxviii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	April 8	ccxxxv., cccxlii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	April 16	ccxlv.
	Do. do.	May 3	ccxxxvi.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	May 8	cclxxxix.
	Do. do.	June 8	cclxvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	June 12	cccxix.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	June 18	cccii.
	To Mrs. Newton	June	ccc.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	July 8	cxev.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	July 11	cccii.
	To Mrs. Cowper	July 20	cccx.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	July 27	cxevi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	July 30	clxix.
	Do. do.	Aug. 21	ccxlv.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Sept. 3	ccxc.
	Do. do.	Sept. 7	cxix.
	Do. do.	Oct. 5	cxix.
	Do. do.	Nov. 9	ccciv.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Dec. 21	xxxix.
1781.	Do. do.	Feb. 4	cxiv., cccxxi.
	Do. do.	Feb. 18	xiii., cxv.
	Do. do.	March 18	xl.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	April 2	xli.
	Do. do.	May 1	cxvi.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	May 9	cxvii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	May 13	cccv.
	Do. do.	May 21	ccclix.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	May 23	v., cccxliii.
	Do. do.	May	vii.
	Do. do.	June 5	cccxlviii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	July 12	cccxvii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	July 29	ccvi.
	To Mrs. Newton	August	cccliii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Aug. 16	ccxiv.
	Do. do.	Aug. 21	xlii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Aug. 25	xliii., cxviii.

	To Mrs. Newton	Sept. 16	ccclx.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Sept. 18	clxx., cclxxiii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Sept. 26	xliv., ccxxxix.
	Do. do.	Oct. 6	ccclvii.
	To Mrs. Cowper	Oct. 19	cxix.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Nov. 5	ccclviii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Nov. 9	ccclxi.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Nov. 24	cxx.
	Do. do.	Nov. 26	clxiv.
	Do. do.	—	cccv.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Nov. 27	cccvii.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Dec. 9	cccviii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Dec. 21	cccx.
	Do. do.	Dec. 31	cccx.
1782.	To the Rev. William Unwin	Jan. 5	cclxxiv.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Jan. 13	cccx.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Jan. 17	cclxiv., cclxxv
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Jan. 31	clxviii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Feb. 9	xl.
	Do. do.	Feb. 24	xlvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	March 6	ccii., cccxii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	March 7	xlvi., cccxliv.
	To Mrs. Newton	March 14	ccclxii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	—	xlvi.
	Do. do.	April 1	ccxxxvii.
	Do. do.	April 27	ccxxvii
	Do. do.	May 27	cxlvii., cccxvii.
	Do. do.	June 12	cxlviii.
	Do. do.	Aug. 3	ccxlvii.
	To Lady Austen	Aug. 12	cciii.
	To the Rev. William Bull	Oct. 27	liv.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Nov. 4	cxxi.
	Do. do.	Nov. 18	ccxii., cxcvii.
	Do. do.	Nov. 30	clxxx.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Dec. 7	clix.
1783.	To the Rev. William Unwin	Jan. 19	xlix.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Jan. 26	ccciv.

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	To the Rev. William Unwin	Feb. 2	cccxcv.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Feb. 20	lxxxiii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Feb. 24	cccxcvi.
	Do. do.	May 31	cccxliv.
	To the Rev. William Bull	June 3	clxxiv.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	June 8	clxxv.
	To the Rev. John Newton	June 13	cccxxviii.
	Do. do.	July 27	clvi.
	To the Rev. William Bull	Aug. 3	ccxl.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Aug. 4	cxxiv., cclxviii.
	Do. do.	Sept. 29	cccl.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Oct. 20	clvii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Nov. 10	cccxxix., cccxli.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Nov. 17	ccc., cccli.
	Do. do.	Dec. 15	ccclii.
1784.	To the Rev. William Unwin	Jan. 3	cccxxvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Jan. 13	lv.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	—	lvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Jan. 25	cccxxviii.
	To the Rev. William Bull	Feb. 22	cxxv.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Feb.	cccxxii.
	Do. do.	March 11	cccxxviii.
	Do. do.	March 19	clx., cclxxxii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	March 21	cclxxvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	March 29	cccxcviii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	April 5	cclxxxvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	April 26	cccxlvi.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	May 8	cxxvi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	June 5	cclxxvii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	July 3	cccxi., cccxxiii.
	Do. do.	July 12	l.
	Do. do.	—	viii., li.
	To the Rev. John Newton	July 19	iv.
	Do. do.	Aug. 16	cccxvii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Aug. 27	lii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Sept. 18	ccxv.
	Do. do.	Oct. 9	cccxxviii.

	To the Rev. William Unwin	Oct. 10	cxxvii.
	Do. do.	Oct. 20	cxxviii., cccliv
	To the Rev. John Newton	Oct. 30	cxxix.
	To the Rev. William Bull	Nov. 8	cxxxii.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Nov.	iii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Nov. 27	cxxxiii.
	Do. do.	Dec. 11	cxxxiv.
1785.	To the Rev. William Unwin	Jan. 15	cxxxv.
	Do. do.	Feb. 7	clxxx.
	To the Rev. John Newton	March 19	ccxvi.
	Do. do.	April 22	cxxxvi.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	April 30	xix.
	To John Unwin	June 12	cxxxvii.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	June 25	ccxvii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	July 9	ccix.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	July 27	clxxxii., ccclix.
	Do. do.	Aug. 27	ccclxxviii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Sept. 24	xvi., cxcviii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Oct. 12	lvii.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Nov. 5	cxcix.
	To Lady Hesketh	Nov. 23	cccl.
	Do. do.	Nov. 30	clxxxv.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Dec. 3	lviii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Dec. 6	ccvii.
	Do. do.	Dec. 8	li.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Dec. 10	ccclxvii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Dec. 15	lx., ccclxviii.
	To the Rev. William Unwin	Dec. 31	lxi.
	To the Rev. Matthew Powley	—	clxi.
1786.	To Lady Hesketh	—	clxxvi.
	Do. do.	Jan. 16	lxii.
	Do. do.	Jan. 23	lxiii.
	Do. do.	Jan. 31	lxiv.
	Do. do.	Feb. 9	ccxviii.
	Do. do.	Feb. 11	xxi.
	Do. do.	Feb. 27	liii., ccclix.
	Do. do.	March 29	ccxxiii.

To Lady Hesketh	April 10	ccxxiv.
Do. do.	April 14	xv., ccxxv.
Do. do.	May 1	ccviii.
Do. do.	May 8	ccx.
To the Rev. Walter Bagot	May 20	cxxxviii.
To Lady Hesketh	May 25	clxv.
Do. do.	May 29	ccxi.
Do. do.	June 5	ix., clxxvii.
To Joseph Hill, Esq.	June 9	xx.
To Lady Hesketh	June 12	lxv.
To Joseph Hill, Esq.	June 19	lxvi.
To the Rev. William Unwin	July 3	lxvii.
To the Rev. John Newton	July	lxviii.
To the Rev. William Unwin	Aug. 24	lxix.
Do. do.	—	xii.
Do. do.	—	cclxxxv.
To the Rev. Walter Bagot	Aug. 31	cclxv.
To the Rev. William Unwin	Sept. 24	clxxi.
Do. do.	—	x.
To the Rev. John Newton	Sept. 30	clxxii.
To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Oct. 6	cxxxix.
To the Rev. John Newton	Nov. 17	lxx.
To Lady Hesketh	Dec. 4	lxxi.
Do. do.	Dec. 11	lxxii.
To the Rev. John Newton	Dec. 16	ccxix.
To Lady Hesketh	Dec. 24	lxxiii.
1787. To the Rev. Walter Bagot	Jan. 3	cxlix.
To Lady Hesketh	Jan. 18	lxxiv.
To Samuel Rose, Esq.	July 24	cclxxxvii.
Do. do.	Aug. 27	clxxxvi., cclxxxviii.
To Lady Hesketh	Sept. 4	ccxcii.
Do. do.	Sept. 8	cccxiv.
Do. do.	Oct. 5	clxxxiii.
To Samuel Rose, Esq.	Oct. 19	xvii.
To Lady Hesketh	Nov. 3	cciv.
Do. do.	Nov. 10	ccli.

	To Lady Hesketh	Nov. 27	cl.
	Do. do.	Dec. 19	lxxv.
	Do. do.	Dec. 24	lxxvi., cclii.
1788.	Do. do.	Jan. 1	cccxlvi.
	Do. do.	Feb. 1	cxl.
	Do. do.	Feb. 7	clxxviii., ccxciii.
	To Mrs. King	Feb. 12	clxxxviii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Feb. 16	cclvii., ccxxix.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Feb. 19	cclviii.
	To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.	Feb. 21	clxxxvii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Feb. 22	cccxix.
	Do. do.	March 3	ccliii.
	To Mrs. King	March 3	clxxxix.
	To Lady Hesketh	March 12	cclix.
	To Mrs. Hill	March 17	ccxcvi.
	To General Cowper	—	cclx.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	March 29	cclxi.
	To the Rev. John Newton	April 19	cclxii.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	May 24	cxli.
	To the Rev. Walter Bagot	June 17	cclxiii.
	To Mrs. King	June 19	cclxxxix.
	To the Rev. John Newton	June 24	cc.
	To Lady Hesketh	June 27	ccliv.
	Do. do.	July 28	cli., ccxii.
	Do. do.	Aug. 8	clii.
	To Mrs. King	Aug. 28	cxc.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Sept. 2	ccl.
	To Lady Hesketh	Sept. 13	ccxiii.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	Sept. 25	lxxvii.
	To Mrs. King	Oct. 11	ccxxxviii.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	Nov. 30	vi.
	To Mrs. King	Dec. 6	i., xi.
	To Robert Smith, Esq.	Dec. 20	cccxxv.
1789.	To Lady Hesketh	Jan. 31	lxxviii.
	Do. do.	Feb. 25	cccxxxi.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	May 20	cxlii.
	Do. do.	June 5	cclxxix., ccclxiii.

1790.	To Mrs. Throckmorton	July 18	clxxix.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Aug. 16	clxxiii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Dec. 13	cclv.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Dec. 18	cccxxxiii.
	To Lady Hesketh	Jan. 26	cxc.
	Do. do.	Feb. 26	lxxix.
	To Mrs. Bodham	Feb. 27	lxxx.
	To John Johnson, Esq.	Feb. 28	lxxxi.
	To Mrs. King	March 12	cxliii.
	To Mrs. Throckmorton	March 21	ccclv.
	Do. do.	May 10	ccxcix
	To Lady Hesketh	May 28	cliii.
	Do. do.	June 3	cliv.
	To John Johnson, Esq.	June 7	xiv.
	To Mrs. King	June 14	ccxlii.
	To Lady Hesketh	July 7	cccxxxiv.
	To John Johnson, Esq.	July 31	clxii.
	To Mrs. Bodham	Sept. 9	lxxxii.
	Do. do.	Nov. 21	ii.
	To Mr. Johnson	—	ccclxx.
1791.	To John Johnson, Esq.	Jan. 21	cxci.
	To the Rev. Walter Bagot	March 18	ccclxxx.
	To Mrs. Throckmorton	April 1	lxxxiii.
	To Lady Hesketh	May 18	cxliv.
	Do. do.	May 27	lxxxiv.
	To the Rev. Mr. Hurd	June 13	lxxxv., cclvi.
	To Lady Hesketh	June 23	lxxxvi.
	Do. do.	June 26	ccv.
	Do. do.	July 11	lxxxvii., cccxxxv.
	To the Rev. William Bull	July 27	cccxxxvi.
	To the Rev. Walter Bagot	Aug. 2	clxiii.
	To the Rev. Mr. Hurd	Aug. 9	xxiii., ccxx.
	To Lady Hesketh	Aug. 30	cxlv.
	To the Rev. Walter Bagot	Sept. 21	ccxciv.
	To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.	Oct. 22	lxxxviii.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	Dec. 21	lxxxix.
1792.	To the Rev. John Newton	March 18	cccxxxii.

	To Lady Hesketh	March 25	xc.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	April 6	xcii.
	To Lady Hesketh	May 24	xciii.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	June 4	xciv.
	Do. do.	June 7	xcv.
	To the Rev Thomas Carwardine	June 11	xci.
	To the Rev. William Bull	July 25	xcii.
	To the Rev. Mr. Greatheed	Aug. 6	xciii.
	To Mrs. Courtenay	Aug. 12	xciv.
	To Lady Hesketh	Aug. 26	xcv.
	Do. do.	Sept. 9	xci.
	To Mrs. Courtenay	Sept. 10	cc.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	Sept. 21	cc.
	Do. do.	Oct. 2	cc.
	To the Rev. John Newton	Oct. 18	cc.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	Nov. 9	cc.
	To Lady Hesketh	Dec. 1	cc.
	To Samuel Teedon, Esq.	Dec. 4	cc.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Dec. 16	cc.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	Dec. 26	cc.
1793.	Do. do.	Jan. 20	cc.
	To the Rev. Mr. Hurd	Feb. 23	cc.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	Feb. 24	cc.
	To the Rev. Walter Bagot	March 4	cc.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	March 29	cc.
	To the Rev. John Newton	April 25	cc.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	May 21	cc.
	Do. do.	July 7	cc.
	To Mrs. Courtenay	Aug. 20	cc.
	To the Rev. John Johnson	Sept. 6	cc.
	To William Hayley, Esq.	Oct. 5	cc.
	To Mrs. Courtenay	Nov. 4	cc.
	To Joseph Hill, Esq.	Nov. 5	cc.
	To the Rev. Walter Bagot	Nov. 10	cc.
	To Samuel Rose, Esq.	Dec. 8	cc.
1794.	To William Hayley, Esq.	Jan. 5	cc.

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1795.	To Lady Hesketh	Aug. 27	cviii.
	To Mr. Buchanan	Sept. 5	cix.
1796.	To Lady Hesketh	Jan. 22	cx.
1798.	To the Rev. John Newton	July 29	cx.
	To Lady Hesketh	Oct. 13	cxii.
1799.	To the Rev. John Newton	April 11	cxiii.

FINIS